

GOOSE FAIR

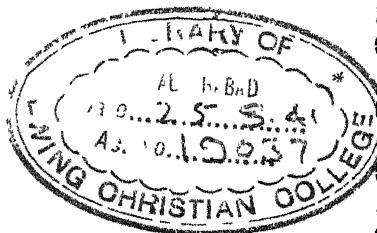
A NOVEL

BY

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"Scissors," "Sails of Sunset," etc.



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To
B. V. SHANN

GOOSE FAIR

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PRELUDE

AT the south of Hyde Park Corner stands the statue of David, at the north, of Diana. Diana, the virgin huntress with her bow, is waiting in the small woodland that lies where Rotten Row begins. Here, in a little paradise of green grass, such as England grows, set with beds of bright tulips, ranked like soldiers in spring, and banks of flaming rhododendrons in summer, stands Diana, slim, lovely, her limbs touched by the spring winds, breathed upon by lime-scented June. She is borne aloft, in a basin whose brimming lip invites the birds. It may be those four caryatids, bearing that basin, are her nymphs, who will not desert her in this unromantic age. We may look upon her now, nude, enchanting, and be spared the fate of Actæon, for whom it was death to glimpse her loveliness.

But for whom the fatal arrow about to wing from her deadly bow? Can angered love touch her now, Apollo's sister, captive in bronze, in this London whose traffic roars in her ears? The world of fashion saunters by, the horses pace the sand along the Row, the cars hum ceaselessly as they turn in at the great gates and run north and west. For whom the arrow?

And David? This strong-limbed youth whose curled head fronts the sweep of Grosvenor Place,

whose muscled loins and arms tell of a strength to avenge as well as a grace to charm, is he, too, a prisoner of bronze, isled amid the traffic, on his plinth of stone? He has slain Goliath; he stands, a memorial to a thousand Davids, slain by Moloch. Passing the love of women, must he wait there alone, sword in hand, his strength, his beauty charming none?

Poor Diana! Poor David! It seems as if the heartless traffic of London, sweeping in full flood from Knightsbridge to Piccadilly, and Piccadilly to Knightsbridge, will forever keep them asunder. If he but turned, would she not spare him her arrow, surrender her grace; would not his heart leap, his youth surge within him, to see her there? He, the young god; she, the young goddess.

We had thought they were bronze, and sorrowed for them. But one day they became flesh, and we sighed for them. This is their story, the story of David and Diana, the youth of Palestine and the maiden of Greece, now lovers in London.

CHAPTER I

I

EVERY first Thursday in October, following the custom of centuries, the good people of the city whose Sheriff was so soundly abused by Robin Hood, take leave of their senses. It is a licensed leave, whose charter is lost in antiquity, and was old when Edward I restored its privileges to the Burgesses of Nottingham, maintaining the right to hold a Goose Fair.

Thrice only in a thousand years have the citizens suffered a break in their privilege—when the Great Plague made Merrie England a graveyard in 1646; when the new calendar robbed the people of eleven days; and when the Great War menaced their freedom. Plagues and wars have passed, the Fair endures, but to-day its merchandise is merriment. For three days the great market-place holds carnival. During Tuesday and Wednesday the place is invaded by the traveling menagerie of wild beasts, the roundabouts, the windmill-like helter-skelter, the cakewalk, the swing-boats, the pigmy, the lion-tamer, the seller of Grantham gingerbread, the man with the cokernut shy, the tray of toys, pop-guns and balloons—all the rough gypsy-founded brotherhood of caravans and tents that wanders through the countryside and towns.

At noon on Thursday the multitude has packed

itself around a wooden platform. Here, led by the Beadle with the Mace, supported by the Town Clerk, bewigged, and the Aldermen and Councilors, comes His Worship the Mayor. The chain of office is round his neck, the queer little three-cornered hat is on his head, the fur-tipped gown about his shoulders. He might have stepped from the wings into the full rout of a ballet, three centuries old, to be flouted by good-humored ladies. But he is very serious now. The Town Clerk takes a scroll, OYEZ! OYEZ! OYEZ! he exclaims, reading the proclamation—Whereas several Prescriptive Rights and Franchises are by divers Royal Charters and Letters Patent rectified and confirmed to the Burgesses of this City . . . God Save the King!

The crowd pushes, children cry, women faint, the clock strikes twelve, the Mayor declares the Goose Fair open. There is an immediate scream of steam whistles from the roundabouts, a clang of brass bells before the shows, a din of voices, a pushing and elbowing, a scrambling and shouting, all the untidy fervor of that sweaty multitude which William Shakespeare knew of old. For the Goose Fair is the scene of family reunions, the meeting place of country cousins, and the fairyland of the children.

But it is towards midnight that the fiercest revelry begins. At midnight silence falls, and since Saturday night brings finality to this carnival, the climax of hilarity and horseplay is then reached. Twelve! strikes the clock. The brass band on the menagerie front plays "God Save the King," and, to the music of a roundabout organ, the crowd sings *God be with you till we meet again.*

The next morning there is a Sunday cleanness and

quietude. The Fair has miraculously vanished overnight; the market-place is clean and bare. The citizens look at each other, unwilling to believe the foolery they enjoyed. Sanity has returned.

II

"Oh!" cried Diana, as she was swept off her feet and carried on a human wave surging wildly up Beastmarket Hill. Another wave, surging down, met them, with screams and scimmages, flying hats and jostling shoulders. Diana felt herself being drawn down by that mad vortex into which she had been swept. A band of lads and lasses, hands on shoulders, were threading a serpentine chain through the dense mass. It pulled, rolled, bulged, swayed and then bore on insistently. Diana fought desperately to keep her feet. Bells clanged, whistles screamed, somewhere in Bostock and Wombwell's Menagerie a lion roared. The pandemonium drowned the clocks striking eleven. One hour more!

"Oh! Oh!" cried Diana, desperately. She had been swept off her feet again, and would have gone down under that mad trampling had not an arm suddenly linked itself under hers. The next moment she felt herself lifted up and borne off in a wild current of youth racing downwards into the human maelstrom. Suddenly the chain broke and Diana felt herself cast off, with a force that would have sent her headlong had not that strong arm still supported her. Then for the first time, as they stood free of the mob, she saw him.

"Hello!" he laughed.

"Hello!" she replied, laughing too, and adjusting her hat which had been shapelessly crushed. Then, self-conscious, she colored. What would her father say if he knew? Here she was, whirled about in a crowd of roysterers, with an unknown young man linking his arm through hers! Well, it was Goose Fair. That was the excuse.

"I say, isn't it fun?" he laughed again.

She saw he had nice teeth, and a clean, pleasant smile. His cap was pulled well down over his eyes, but she caught the sparkle in them. He was probably twenty-five or so.

"Yes, but it's very rough," she answered, breathless.

"I say—I hope you aren't hurt? I just caught you in time," he said, a sudden earnestness following his smile.

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you."

Yes, he was pleasant to look at. A football-looking young man with a good chin. His voice told Diana that he was well-educated, which bore out what she had told her mother, that you met all kinds of people in the Fair. Already she had seen the Westmarks from Setton Rectory, and young Pearson from Kegton Hall, and Helen and Marjorie Raikes, old Colonel Jerkyn's horsey nieces. Her father was impossibly old-fashioned, reflected Diana. Other vicars' daughters enjoyed life, why couldn't she enjoy hers?

"This show stops at twelve, doesn't it," asked the young man, looking straight into her eyes. He couldn't help looking. They reminded him of the Lido on an August day, when the hot sand burnt your feet, they were such an Italian blue. A neat

little hat was pressed down over her ears and a wisp of fair hair fell over her brow. She tucked it away, as she answered, with the thinnest of fingers and white wrist. She was lovely.

"Yes, it stops at midnight. Is this your first time?" she asked.

"Yes—I live in London," he said. "It's great fun, isn't it? Let's go on the roundabouts!"

She glanced at him quickly. She trusted him, liked him even, but she said—

"Thank you—I must go home. Good night!"

She saw his face cloud. He came closer to her and impulsively put both hands on her arm.

"Oh, please, don't—I don't know a soul here!" he pleaded, looking down at her, his face so near that she saw he had dark eyebrows and eyelashes. There was an olive tan to his skin, but his lips were red as rowan berries. Perhaps she should have resented his hands on her arm, perhaps she did, yet she felt a slight thrill of pleasure.

"But I must—I should have been home at eleven," she said.

"No one goes home at eleven—this last hour's the best. Why, just look! It's beautiful really, isn't it? *Carneval*—we ought to have music by Schumann. P'r'aps this is better though."

She looked, with him, down upon the Fair. The lights lit up the façades of the buildings fronting three sides of the great open space. The clouds, low and rain-heavy, glowed ruddily over the glare. Color flowed out in amber floods from booths and awnings lit with oil flares. The roundabouts looked like little volcanoes, with jets of steam blowing up above their pyramidal awnings. The dark sea of

humanity filled the spaces between buildings and stalls and shows. A medley of sound, hive-like, hummed in their ears, broken harshly by those bells, whistles and the roaring of animals in the cages near them. Yet what caught the fancy of Diana most were his words. Music by Schumann—*Carneval*. Young men of her acquaintance didn't talk like this. Who was he, what was he?

Another sudden gust of humanity swept them along. He held to her and fought off a lout who teased her with a tickler. They were stranded again near a roundabout.

"Come along—just one ride before you go!" he cried, and without waiting for an answer he shouldered his way through the mob.

Delirium now seized the revelers. The prices on the roundabouts jumped from twopence to fourpence, fourpence to sixpence. Men and women, young colliers from mining villages, farm hands from the country-side, lads from offices and lasses from lace factories, fought desperately for places in the gondola-cars, on the horses, the roosters, the ostriches, on all the ungainly, savage-striding, side-jerking menagerie that whirled giddily round, to the braying of *Tea for Two*, *Soldiers' Chorus*, *Way down Kentucky*, *Ora Pro Nobis* on the pipe organ, decorated with full-breasted mermaids and paint-gawdy nymphs.

He wrested a place in a gondola-car from another youth, pushed Diana forward, and leapt in just as the car started its switchback gyration. But two others leapt in also, a drunken lout with a disheveled girl who shrieked with excitement every time the car rolled. The ride was a short one.

"We'll stay—we've hardly had a ride yet," said Diana's companion, who had kept the other couple away.

"I must go—really, please!" she pleaded.

She felt his arm go round her. Was he going to kiss her? She was a prisoner, lamenting her folly. The car lurched, descended, rolled, rose on its fresh journey. The organ brayed. The roar of the crowd drowned his words in her ears. But he did not attempt to kiss her, instead he protected her from their sottish companions, contriving to hide from her their fuddled mauling and mouthing. It was impossible to talk, but they laughed with each other. How her eyes danced, and the color of her cheeks and lips! She was like a rose leaf, delicate, dewy in this storm of coarse humanity. And as she felt his nearness, saw his wholesomeness, the clear strong line of shoulder and neck, face and hands, she felt safe with him. The roundabout stopped. There was another mad scramble.

"Oh, again!—that pair's going, thank God!—beastly drunk!—does it make you giddy? No?" he called.

Whatever her response, they were off again. They tried to talk, but it was impossible. Bedlam was loose. Carnival was in the air, youth was in the car. They rode dizzily. They laughed, intoxicated with the wild, mad minutes leaping to midnight. Now, the helter-skelter! They must ride on the helter-skelter! They took their mats, climbed the windmill and slid recklessly down. They climbed again, and again, and yet again, breathless, laughing, forgetful even that they were young, conscious only that they were happy.

And then, without warning, the Fair ended. Twelve! struck the clock. There was a last scream of whistles, a wild whooping of the crowd. Lights were lowered and put out, and an army of workmen tore at stanchions, stays and ropes. The fairy façades vanished, the roofs collapsed; like a pricked bubble, the Fair was depleted and formless.

"I will see you home," he said, as they stood for a moment, watching the rapid transformation of the scene.

"Thank you—but it's not far. I'm so terribly late," said Diana.

It was past midnight. In her heart she knew the mischief was done. Her father would be livid with anger. She had broken her promise to her mother for eleven o'clock. And then rebellion flickered up in her heart. She was twenty-one. There were hundreds of decent young couples about her. Why should she be treated like a child and go on suffering an unreasonable father's tyranny!

"Oh, but I must see you home," he pleaded; "it's so late. We'll get a taxi."

"There aren't any," she said. "Besides, I'm only ten minutes' walk."

He slipped his arm through hers in his friendly fashion, and made a way out through the crowd. They mounted the hill, noisy with revelers. The closed public houses had added an unpleasant element. She was glad of his presence. They walked in silence for a time.

"I suppose you live in Nottingham?" he asked at last. "It seems a jolly little place."

"Yes—all my life, but it's not little," she replied, and then, realizing civic pride had roused her, she

added, laughingly—"Of course, to you it's an absurd little place after London. I've always wanted to live there."

"Have you? Well, it's not the place, it's the people that matter, isn't it? I didn't know Nottingham, for instance, had so many pretty girls."

Diana glanced at him sharply, and noticed how clear-cut was his profile in the lamplight as they passed.

"Is that all you think about?" she said, a little curtly.

She saw him wince at her retort, and felt sorry at once.

"I say—you must think I'm an awful flirt!" he complained. "But I'm not, really."

"I'm sorry," said Diana, simply. They turned off now, along an asphalt walk. He noticed they were on a kind of terrace cresting a cliff.

"Why sorry?" he asked. There was a black gulf between them, with a few lights far below. They seemed on the rim of a natural amphitheater.

"I don't really think that about you. You've been very—nice," she said, a little reluctant at that last word. "Look, that's my home."

She pointed to a line of houses above them, dark against the sky. And then, turning towards the black gulf below—

"That's the valley of the Trent down there, with Clifton woods, and, further off, the Charnwood Forest, and the Quorn country."

She spoke cheerfully, though her heart was as lead. There was not a light in the vicarage. But her mother had given her the key for the private door, through the garden way. Perhaps, as she was

so very late, her father had gone to bed. His temper was always better in the morning, and he was more tractable then. Also, she knew her mother would be listening alertly, to help her quietly in, as she had so often done. Poor mother! What storms she had gone through for her children.

Diana looked up into the young man's face, as he turned to her after peering through the darkness.

"Well—it's Good night and Good-by," she said.

He took her hand and kept it. His was ungloved, and she felt its strength and warmth.

"I say—won't you tell me your name?" he asked.

"I don't know yours," she laughed.

"Oh—er—mine's—David—David Hameldon."

"Mine's Diana—Diana Delaney."

He was silent a moment; then, smiling at her—

"Diana—that's a lovely name!" he murmured.

They were silent again. How quiet the night was, after that revelry.

"Are you staying here?" asked Diana, curiosity triumphant.

"No—I go to-morrow. I've been here a week," he said.

She thought it strange he should leave on a Sunday, after a week's visit. Then suddenly, with a little thrill, she stumbled on the truth. He was an actor, touring. It accounted for his face, his fine manners.

"Oh—you're an actor!" she cried, breathlessly. He was the first actor she had known, humanly.

But he seemed startled a little by her discovery, and then he laughed lightly. He was still holding her hand, and, suddenly conscious of the fact, she withdrew it.

"No—I'm not an actor," he said. "I'm just here with the company, as it happens. So I fear I shan't see you again—it's been very jolly."

He removed his cap, and by the lamp on the terrace-walk she saw him plainly now. He had a fine brow, white beneath a head of black hair that shone glossily.

Diana took his outstretched hand again.

"Good-by, Mr. Hameldon," she said, almost gravely.

Then, with such quick decision that she had no choice, he had pressed her to him, holding his lips to hers, the cry on her warm wet mouth stifled by his ardor. It seemed he held her a long time in that silence shaken by her heart-beats, but it was only a few seconds, and then he had gone—gone so swiftly and abruptly that she had no time for remonstrance. She stood still, amazed, half in anger, half in a trance of unnameable joy, and watched him disappear in the night. The next moment, she hurried towards the vicarage and passed into the silence of the garden. She looked up at the house, all dark, then at the sky, spangled with stars, and heard the tinkle of the artificial cascade, as it fell into the little fern-pool. Her heart beat quickly within her. It should have been with apprehension of the ordeal before her, but it was with the ecstasy that had just swept over her.

"David—David Hameldon," she thought. It was a pleasant name. And Diana—he had thought Diana a lovely name. Now he was gone, and she would never see him look at her like that again—or hear her name made music by his voice.

CHAPTER II

THE Rev. Stephen Delaney, M.A., Vicar of St. Jerome's, had finished his sermon for the next day. He was one of those unhappy creatures who spend a week of torture thinking out a twenty minutes' sermon. He could not believe that this labor was due to inability. It gave him private satisfaction to think that his toil was a matter of conscience. For his conscience, after fifty-two years' assiduous cultivation, had become an unchallengeable reason for everything he did, including the making of his home a place of misery for the family.

No one, hearing his pleasant voice in the Parish Room, his grave, kind tones in the pulpit, or his genial words in general society, would have believed that the very popular vicar of St. Jerome's was a petty tyrant on his hearthstone. He had driven one son, Henry, to the devil, which in this case took the form of whisky in Kenya Colony. The eldest daughter, Alice, had hurried into matrimony as a refuge from her father's intolerance. The second son, Gerald, following his course at Guy's Hospital, was studying at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, and had vowed he would never come home. One son, Stephen, the baby, as he was called, although seventeen, and three daughters, Joan, Diana, and Winifred, were at home. For the Rev. Stephen Delaney had been blessed with a quiverful of children, some of whom respected, none of whom loved him. Only

in one person were they united, in the love of their mother, Mary Delaney. She bore the buffeting of all those sudden family storms, she was the buffer between her unreasonably severe husband and the children who sheltered under her wing.

Mary Delaney, three years her husband's junior, had once been a buxom, apple-cheeked farmer's daughter. She had been pretty in her healthy way, a fact her children had never been conscious of, and she had tasted romance in those days when Stephen Delaney, a young curate, came to court her. He was then newly down from St. John's College, Cambridge, and was soon presented to the living of Strowell, in the gift of his uncle, Sir Berkeley Delaney, Bart. In the Delaney family there were those who said Stephen should have looked higher than a small farmer's daughter. Above all, it was preposterous of him, with no money, to marry any one in a similar preposterous condition. But Stephen, head over heels in love, had defied them all, and married his Mary. He had never regretted it, and, according to his fashion, had never ceased to love her.

His fashion, however, had made her the mother of seven healthy children, while it had kept her, in a struggle to make ends meet, in nothing but the toil, if not the position, of a general domestic servant. A little wisp of a maid, coming and going as maids are made, sometimes opened the vicarage door, and, white cap pinned to a pinched head, ushered the callers, sniffing, into the vicar's study. But it was Mary Delaney who cleaned, washed pots and such things as could be saved from the laundry. She cooked meals, nursed her children, mended their

clothes and socks, saw Stephen had a hot bottle to his feet when working, poor soul, so hard on his sermon, and, hiding her red hands, roughly dried on the kitchen roller-towel, hurried into the study to greet and to hear the woes of their parishioners. If Goldsmith's parson had been passing rich on forty pounds a year, it was certain that they were scandalously poor on two hundred and fifty a year. Once, when Mary had rebelled on hearing of a collection to present their bishop with a Rolls-Royce car, Stephen had sternly quelled her.

"He has many calls upon his time and purse, my dear," said her husband.

"And three thousand a year, a palace and a chaplain! He may well feel God is good!" retorted Mrs. Delaney.

"Mary! I am ashamed of you!" exclaimed the Rev. Delaney, in such tones that she said no more. But with Henry lost in Kenya, Gerald pinching himself in Paris, and her husband's own flannel under-clothing a cross-stitch puzzle, she had her moments of exasperation. For nineteen years they had had a fortnight's holiday at Skegness, because it was the cheapest train journey. It may have been bracing, but there were moments when she felt she hated those sand-dunes.

Mary Delaney was thinking hard now, as she sat in the dining-room, before a pile of socks and stockings, all heeled and toed with so much of her darning that the original base had almost vanished. She was wondering whether young Stephen, their family genius, gone to bed an hour ago after completing his homework, would win the Oxford Exhibition that his High School master seemed so certain of.

And if he did, however would they contrive to send him? Well, somehow they'd manage. They always had done, thank God.

The clock struck eleven. Mary Delaney started and dropped her darning.

"Eleven! Good heavens!—that child hasn't returned yet," she said to herself. It was a wonder her husband had not noticed the fact.

As if prompted by the thought, she heard his footsteps at the door.

"Hasn't Diana come in yet?" he said, entering.

She looked up from her work. He seemed cold and pinched.

"Stephen, I'm sure you've done enough. You look so tired," she said.

"That's not what I asked you—where's Diana?" he snapped.

"She'll be here any moment now," said Mrs. Delaney, soothingly.

"You heard what I said to her last night?" demanded the Rev. Delaney. "I said that if ever again she was one minute after eleven she would find the door locked and she could make her bed on the streets!"

"But she was only up at the Gregorys', Stephen, and to-night's Goose Fair," said Mrs. Delaney. In a moment, by the quick flash of her husband's eyes, she knew she had blundered.

"Goose Fair! You don't mean to say that any daughter of mine's in that disgraceful riot at this time of night! Where are the others?"

"They're all in bed. Diana will be here in a minute. You go to bed, Stephen, I'll wait for her."

He rapped his knuckles on the table angrily.

"They're all in bed, of course they are! My children obey me, except Diana. In Goose Fair—think of it! A daughter of mine at this time of night! Mary, put away that work!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Delaney, fear clutching at her heart.

"Put it away—we are going to bed."

"But Diana will be here any minute!"

"She will not enter this house to-night!"

"Stephen!"

"I mean it. She has been warned, again and again."

"But the child——"

"Mary, do not let us have words. Put your work away."

He did not wait to see what she did but left the room abruptly. In a few minutes she knew why. She heard him bolting the doors. The hall door first, then the garden door. She rose to her feet, incredulous. He came into the room. It was then that she saw he had two keys in his hand. He had locked both doors and bolted them. She could not undo them.

"Stephen—you haven't fastened those doors! Diana won't be able to use her key," she said.

"So you gave her a key, Mary?" he said, gravely. "Yes, I have locked and bolted both doors. She will not get in. She will learn I am to be obeyed in my own house."

"But it is monstrous—your own child locked out. You can't know what you're doing! Are you human?" cried Mrs. Delaney.

"Mary, I will not argue with you. I'm waiting for you."

"I won't go! Stephen, listen to me! Don't you realize what you're doing? Children can't be treated like that to-day. All that's over. They must have their liberty. You've good children, Stephen, but you're too severe."

"I have not been severe enough. That any daughter of mine should dare to be in that drunken bedlam at this time of night, proves it. Now, Mary, come along. I wish to turn out the light!"

"Stephen! Stephen!" There were tears coursing down her face now. "You won't do this thing, it is heartless! You drove Henry away—isn't your children's love anything to you?"

She cried out the words, the tears clouding her eyes.

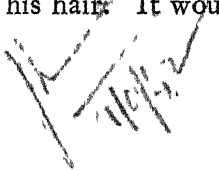
"Mary—how dare you!" thundered the Rev. Delaney. "How dare you make that accusation! Henry! Him!—me the cause of him!"

He trembled with the anger that swept him. Never had his wife spoken like this.

"For thirty years we have been married, Mary. You know me. Let us not quarrel after this long time. I am waiting for you."

His deliberation chilled her heart. For a moment she felt she would defy him. But the quiet submission of years had taken the power from her. Blinded with her tears, she passed out of the room before him.

The Rev. Delaney turned out the hall light and mounted the stairs behind her. Henry! She had accused him of driving out Henry—the son whose record had grayed his hair. It would be difficult to forgive her that.



CHAPTER III

I

BRACING herself, Diana, after her moments of contemplation in the garden, walked up to the door and quietly inserted the key. It turned softly and she pushed the door to open it. To her surprise it did not yield. Again she turned the key, which worked in the lock. Some one had barred the door within. That some one must have been her father.

The discovery dazed her for a few moments. Had he not missed her and presumed she was already in? Last night, when she had been a few minutes late coming home from the Gregorys' party, there had been a ridiculous scene, and he had threatened to lock her out if ever she were late again. But she could not really believe that he would do such a thing, strict as he was. Yet it was strange if her mother, hearing him bolt the door, had not drawn it secretly for her. Every one of them had learned to regard their mother as an infallible ally.

What was she to do now? A scene was inevitable unless—then a cry of relief escaped her as she thought of her brother Stephen's room. His window, on the second floor, was above the porch. She would throw up some pebbles and get him to come down.

She threw one, but ineffectually, and again, harder. This time it would surely awaken him, the rattle on the window had been so loud in the still night.

Then, as she watched, Diana was dismayed to see a light leap up in the first-floor window. It was her father's bedroom. Almost immediately she saw the blind go up and heard the window raised. Her father, in his pajama jacket, leaned out. Diana heard her mother's voice within the room, raised in protesting tones, but he ignored her.

"Well, what do you want?" he called, looking down on Diana.

"The door is bolted, father!"

"I know it is bolted. I bolted it. It is now half-past twelve. You know what I told you. How dare you come here at this time, bringing disgrace on us? Go away, I won't have you in!"

"But, father——" began Diana.

The window was pulled down. The blind drawn. A moment after, the light went out.

The reality of it paralyzed the girl. She stood motionless, feeling her own heart beat in the silence of the garden. The drip of the cascade seemed to mock her. He had threatened her, and now he had carried out his threat.

And suddenly, out of her stillness, the flood of revolt rose and broke through her despair. He was cruel, he was insane. The world knew him as a kindly man, but in his home he was a despicable tyrant. Well, she was not going to be treated or broken, as her poor mother had been broken. She would show him she had a will and strength of her own. Only her mother had held her in so long.

With swift steps Diana walked down the garden, out on to the terrace path.

If only David Hameldon were there now. But the thought was a foolish one, for what could he

have done or wished to have done? There was only one place she could go to now. To her sister Alice, who would give her a bed. In the morning she could decide on the next step. She realized with a singular calmness that she had left the vicarage forever. Her regret for this step was wholly for her poor mother who had to go on living with her father, fighting for some kind of liberty for Stephen and Joan and Winifred.

Almost an hour later Diana had reached West Bridgford, the suburb across the Trent, where her sister lived, and stood knocking at young Mr. and Mrs. Westcotte's door. Diana rang and hammered heavily. Presently she heard sounds of some one stirring. A light flooded the hall. The door was unlocked and opened. John Westcotte stood there in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"Good God! Diana! Whatever's the matter? Come in!" he cried.

Diana stepped into the hall, as a white apparition came down the stairs. It was her sister Alice, in a white nightgown and blue kimono.

"Diana! What's the matter, is father ill?" she cried, hurrying down the stairs.

Diana laughed. It was characteristic that Alice should ask if her father were ill. Their poor mother was never ill, she could never spare the time.

"No—he's not, worse luck! I've been turned out!" said Diana.

"I say, that's rough!" exclaimed Jack Westcotte, running his fingers through a mop of fair hair. He closed the door and locked it.

"Turned out!" echoed Alice, wide-eyed.

Diana had to laugh. Poor Alice looked such a fright with her hair in curling-pins.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Alice, suspiciously.

"My dear, why don't you shingle and save yourself all that trouble—or get a permanent wave. And a nightgown!"

"What do you think I wear in bed?" asked Alice, indignantly.

"Well, I wear pajamas," replied Diana.

"Bravo!" cried Jack.

"Don't be silly!" said his wife, and turning to Diana—"You surely didn't come here at this time of night to tell me that!"

"All right, old thing," said Diana, putting her arm around her sister. "No—I've come because I'm a ruined girl. Father said if I went home a minute after eleven he'd lock me out. And he has, so I've come here."

"What time did you get back?" asked Alice, breathlessly.

"Half-past twelve!"

"Diana! Wherever were you?" cried her sister, more amazed.

"In Goose Fair—with a young man whom I've never seen before. He took me home, and kissed me before he left me!" said Diana, now defiant, and enjoying it.

"Good old Diana!" cried Jack Westcotte.

"Jack, don't be such an idiot," said his wife, sharply. "Diana—you're really amazing. Half-past twelve—father must have had a fit!"

"He articulated clearly enough when he told me

he wouldn't have me in. I've taken him at his word. And Alice—if mother——”

Alice saw in a moment how near this defiance was to tears, and quickly put her arm around Diana, kissing her.

“Come upstairs, darling, we'll all get cold,” she said.

“And if you want to sleep in pajamas, Di, old thing, then you'll have to have a pair of mine,” called Jack, cheerily, following them up the stairs.

II

“Darling, what are you going to do?” asked Alice, the following morning, as they breakfasted. “Shall I go back with you?”

“No, thanks, Alice—I can go alone,” replied Diana.

“I'll go with you, Di; he won't say anything if I'm about, he keeps up the jolly-old-boy stunt with me,” said Jack, helping himself to the marmalade.

“I shan't see him,” replied Diana, “I shall go while he's in church.”

“But you'll have to see father at lunch—unless you stay here,” said Alice.

“No, I shan't! I shall be gone then.”

“Gone—where?” asked the bewildered Alice.

“I say, old thing, you're not going to be rash?” said Jack, anxiously.

“Yes, I am, Jack. I'm sick of being trampled on. I've been nothing but an unpaid domestic servant at home. I've only stood it for mother's sake. And I'm through with it now. I'm going home to

pack. I'll lunch here, and in the afternoon I'm going to London."

They stared at Diana. She was slightly flushed they saw.

"Oh, it'll be all right when you've seen him," said Jack, soothingly. "He's a strict old beggar, and I don't wonder you kick, but he means well."

"Means well!" echoed Diana, indignantly. "He's bullying poor mother into her grave, and he's made life a hell for us all at home. How can you say he means well! Why, Alice married you to get away from it!"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Jack.

"Diana!" protested her sister.

"You know what I mean, although I've put it the wrong way. There's no one to rescue me, so I'll try on my own."

"But London, darling—what can you do in London?" asked her sister, surprised at Diana's show of grit.

"There're over eight million people manage to live there. I shall be able to squeeze in somewhere," she replied.

"Why not stay here—you could live with us, and p'r'aps get something to do. I'll want a typist soon, if my practice grows," said Jack, kindly.

"Thank you, Jack, but I shall be better away," replied Diana. "Mother would fret more if I were here than if I were right away. Besides, I want to do something—get somewhere."

"Diana, you've no idea what a terrible struggle life is in London," said Alice, warningly, "and there's nothing you can do."

"Life's a struggle anywhere, and the more bent

backs there are, the more there are to climb over," said Jack, philosophically. "I wish I'd started there!"

"I know it's a risk, but the worst I can do is to starve," said Diana. "If my spirit gets broken, at least it won't be by my own father. Look at poor mother! Anyhow, I'm not the stuff for martyrdom. Father's going to find that out!"

"Oh, dear! Why can't everybody live in peace!" sighed Alice.

III

At eleven o'clock, when the Rev. Stephen Delaney was safely in church, Diana was back at the vicarage. Her mother opened the door and they were in each other's arms at once.

"Diana, darling! I haven't closed my eyes all night. You went to Alice's?" asked Mrs. Delaney.

"Yes—I've just come from there. Has father said anything?"

"Not a word. Breakfast was like a funeral this morning. Darling, why did you stay out so late? You know how it angers him."

"Mother, anything that we do angers him. I was late, and so were thousands of others or how could Goose Fair go on until midnight? A girl isn't a bad character because she stays out once—besides, I was seen home," said Diana, unable to restrain a little pride in the fact.

"By whom? Perhaps if your father knew——" began Mrs. Delaney.

"He'd be still more furious. I was brought home by a young man I'd never seen before and never shall again!"

"Diana, how could you?" cried her mother.

"What's more, he kissed me—and I kissed him back! I suppose after that there's no hope for me?"

Mrs. Delaney looked at her daughter with despair in her eyes.

"Your father need not know that," she said.

"I don't mind if he does, mother. It can make no difference now."

"Now—what do you mean, Diana?"

Mrs. Delaney looked at her daughter sharply. In the space of twelve hours there had been an extraordinary change in her. She was usually so quiet and docile. But now she had an air of defiance that filled Mrs. Delaney with apprehension. If two such temperaments as these were to clash there could be no reconciliation.

"I mean, mother, that he won't be able to treat me like a naughty child. I'm going to London," said Diana.

She saw her mother's face shadow with pain, and, stirred by it, placed her arms around her neck, and laid her cheek on hers.

"Darling mummy, you're not to cry about it. You know I wouldn't do anything to hurt you—don't you?" pleaded Diana.

Mrs. Delaney looked at her through sudden tears. It was difficult to recognize her daughter in this determined young woman.

"Diana, if you were to say you are sorry, to ask your father to forgive you—he would, Diana. I can reason with him. He's terribly hurt. He didn't want to lock you out, but he had to keep his threat when you were so late."

"Mother—it's no use! I'm not sorry! I won't kow-tow to him. It's what we've done for years, and it makes him worse. Now, darling, there isn't much time. I want to pack and be gone before he comes back. Where are the others?"

"Stephen's working in the study—Joan and Winnie are at church. Oh, Diana, you won't go like this? You'll break your father's heart!" cried Mrs. Delaney, clasping and unclasping her hands in mental anguish.

"It's too hard for that, mum. It's yours I'm worried about. But I'll write to you often, and you can come and see me."

"Diana, you know I couldn't! It would be deserting your father. He'd think I was unloyal. And what can you do in London, darling? It's madness, you mustn't think of it!"

"I've thought of it all night, mum darling. I'm going!"

Diana put off her mother's hands, which had been about her, and began to ascend the stairs. For a moment she faltered, seeing her mother stand there so brokenly, but she knew that hesitation was fatal, and she went on up the stairs.

In her bedroom at the top of the house, overlooking the garden and the park, she began to empty drawers, filling her small trunk, which had not traveled since it had gone with her to Versailles, when she had been sent to a French convent school, at the expense of a favorite aunt, to be "finished." Diana was nearly through her task when Stephen entered the room. He was a raw, clumsy lad with colt-like limbs, but a head of almost classic grace. He

watched his sister for a few moments, with big eyes in his dark boy's face.

"Well—what a mess you've made of it!" he observed at last.

"Thank you for your help—if you hadn't been such a clod this wouldn't have happened!" retorted Diana, pressing down her trunk.

"Why not? I've seen it coming."

"Because you slept so heavily that I had to throw twice at your window and it woke father," she explained.

"I'll bet he was waiting for you. I wish it was me, Di. But you're not going really? Mother's crying her eyes out downstairs. It's a bit flinty to desert us like this. You know, if——"

He stopped, Diana was facing him and to his surprise her mouth trembled. She was on the verge of tears.

"Di—if there's anything I can do," he said, remorsefully.

The next moment she had buried her head on his shoulder and was crying. He comforted her in his awkward fashion. Then, the storm over, he helped to close the trunk and take it downstairs.

"Fetch me a taxi, Stephen," she said.

"What? Now?" he asked, startled by her decisive air.

"Yes, at once, please," said Diana, and went down into the dining-room to her mother. To her surprise she was not there, nor in the study nor the drawing-room. Diana went through to the kitchens. There was no one. As she came out she saw her mother coming down the stairs. She seemed calmer, and had wiped her eyes free of tears.

"I am going, mum darling. I'm lunching at Alice's, and I shall take the one-thirty to London. I'll write the moment I've found a room."

"Diana, you're breaking my heart," said Mrs. Delaney, and then, resignedly—"But perhaps you're right. Have you any money?"

"Twelve pounds—it'll be enough."

"Here's eight, you must take that," said her mother, pressing the notes into her hand. "I had saved it to get your father an anthracite stove for the study, he complains of the gas."

"Keep it, mother, and use it yourself," urged Diana. "I've quite enough."

"Twelve pounds is nothing, Diana, in London. I shall be miserable if you haven't more. I suppose I'll be miserable in any case," she added, with a brave, futile attempt to smile.

The hall door opened. Stephen entered.

"Here you are, Di!" he called, and proceeded to take out her small trunk.

"You'll write at once, Diana? I shall want to send things."

"Yes, mum. Good-by, darling mum! I'll see you soon!"

Mrs. Delaney could not answer. They clung to each other for a long moment. Stephen stood blowing his nose lustily.

"Good-by, Stephen!" she said.

He kissed her awkwardly, misty-eyed.

"Good luck, Di. You're a brick," he muttered.

"Give my love to Joan and Winnie. I'll write you all," said Diana, hurrying down the steps. Her poor mother stood dimly at the back of the hall, but she dare not look round. With a set mouth

she got into the taxi-cab. The door slammed. She was off.

IV

At a quarter-past twelve the Rev. Stephen Delaney returned to the vicarage. He was surprised to find his wife in the study. One glance at her face revealed tragedy.

"Mary—what is the matter?"

She sat with both hands in her lap, listlessly, and seemed not to hear him at first. Then, turning her pale, tear-stained face towards him—

"Diana has been—and left. She leaves for London at half-past one," she said. Even now he might relent and fetch her back.

For a few moments he made no comment, but she saw his face quiver at the news. Then he sat down, looking before him.

"I don't know what I have done to deserve such children," he said in a low, weary voice.

Mary Delaney got up and left the room. The dinner preparations had been interrupted. The children would want their dinner. She went into the kitchen.

At one o'clock, when the food was on the table, they had all seated themselves, except the Rev. Delaney, who had not yet come into the room.

"Where's father?" asked Joan. She saw her mother had set Diana's place as usual.

Mrs. Delaney made no reply and went to the study to call him. What she saw, when she opened the door, softened the cold anger in her heart against him. For the Rev. Delaney sat at his desk, with his head buried in his folded arms.

She went up to him, and falling to her knees, put her arms around him.

"Stephen!" was all she said.

She felt a hand rest on her head and an arm go across her shoulders, as she hid her face against his black coat, sobbing.

CHAPTER IV

I

It was dark when the train drew in under the great, grim space at St. Pancras, and to make the October afternoon more dismal a light rain was falling. Diana felt depressed and faint, now that she was confronted with the reality of her act and the stimulus of excitement was gone. She wished she had stayed overnight at her sister's, and traveled down early on the morrow to give her a full day in which to seek lodgings.

Depositing her trunk, until she could fetch it, she walked out of the station towards the buses. Her knowledge of London was confined almost to transit across, when she had gone from St. Pancras to Victoria, on her way to France. Then she had taken a taxi, but now she felt she must save every penny. For this same reason she was making an effort to find lodgings at once.

Even one night at an hotel would cost more than she could really spare. Jack had given her addresses. Two were houses where he had stayed when he had come to London as a student, to be coached for his final examination. It was a singular thing that she knew not a soul in this vast city.

Yes, she knew one person. David Hameldon. Diana laughed at herself. It was ridiculous. He was swallowed up in London, and had forgotten all about her. The strange fancy came to her that per-

haps he had come down by the same train. He had told her he was leaving on Sunday. How extraordinary, if they had met on the train! That was impossible, of course, for she remembered now he was on tour, and more probably had gone north or west, to Leeds, Manchester or some large provincial town.

"'Ere, miss! look where you're going!" cried a rough voice, as a taxi swerved in the road to avoid her.

Diana started. The vehicle missed her by an inch. What a thing to have done! Here she was, at the most serious moment of her life, dreaming of David Hameldon, in the middle of the road. She might have been killed within five minutes of her arrival in London. Well, that wouldn't have mattered much.

She caught a bus that took her to Baker Street. There was an address near there, where Jack's sister had stayed on her visits to London. The house was in a small side-street, a flat-faced dwelling, with an area in front. She rang the bell, a little timidly. After a time she rang again, since no one came. There was the noise of a door opening in the area.

"What do you want?" asked a woman's shrill voice, from below.

"I am looking for a bedroom, and I've been given your——" began Diana.

"We've no rooms, and what's more, miss, we don't take no one in on Sundays. Folks as have to move on Sundays aren't folks as we like to have here!"

And with that the door was slammed, and the area was in darkness again.

At any other time this cold reception would have

made Diana shrink within herself, but now, assisted by mingled indignation and desperation, the flame of battle leapt up in her. She would find a room to-night. She would ring bells until she had found what she wanted.

At the corner of Blandford Street Diana hesitated. Her next address, in High Street, must be somewhere near. Turning right, she found herself in George Street. Half-way down, in the old fanlight of a door, she read, on a card—"Room to Let." The house was old, but with a quaint Victorian charm. There was actually a pair of Nottingham lace curtains in the window, very clean she noticed, and, of course, an aspidistra. She remembered how she had played "Aspidistras" with Stephen. You each walked down one side of a long street and counted the number in the windows. An aspidistra on a bamboo stand counted as two. She had once won with a record score of seventy-eight. Now, looking at the aspidistra, which seemed to flourish, it gave Diana a homely feeling. She rang.

After a long wait there were footsteps in the hall, and the door opened, revealing a strange little woman in a white apron, which she had hastily tucked on one side. She was a woman of about sixty-five, plump, with wisps of gray hair floating about her brow and face, which had a country redness notwithstanding her general dowdiness. She stood peering at Diana, while she continued to wipe her hands. Suddenly a large black cat slipped by her.

"'Ere, Felix! In you come!—you're not goin' prowling to-night, no you're not! We've 'ad enough of that!"

The cat hesitated. With a swift movement of a bulgy buttoned boot it was swept back into the hall, and shooed to inner darkness.

"Am sorry to 'ave bin so long, miss. You don't know what you've caught me a-doing, do you?" she laughed pleasantly at Diana. "I'm making my Christmas puddings! I believe in bein' early. And on Sundays, with my young people mostly out, I get a bit of a chance."

"I see you have a room to let," said Diana.

"Yes, come in, dearie. It's a nice room, too."

Diana stepped into the narrow hall, out of which the stairs led, upwards and downwards. The door closed behind her.

"Is it for yourself you're wanting it?" asked the woman, now adjusting her apron and tidying her hair.

"Yes, for myself. How much is the room?"

"Come upstairs, dearie, it's on the third floor, nice and airy-like," said the landlady, leading the way. But just as she was about to mount they heard some one descending and paused. A young man came down. He was elegant and well-groomed. His clothes were shaped to his body like a glove, with a very pronounced waist in the long overcoat that clung to him. He wore a brown felt hat with the brim rakishly turned, fore and aft. Lavender gloves, a cane, silk socks and suède shoes completed his attire. Somehow he seemed out of the picture. He swept by with a musical "Good evening," to which the landlady responded.

"You won't forget my hot-water bottle, Mrs. Maggs?" he called, as he let himself out of the door.

"I certainly won't, Mr. Moul't!" she assured him.

"That's one of my young men, dearie," said the lady, whose name was apparently Mrs. Maggs, as they mounted the stairs. "He's in the profession."

"Profession?" queried Diana, puzzled by Mr. Moul't's calling.

"On the stige, dearie, an' very clever, too, they say. He's a nice boy 'e is. Not racketty with the girls, like a lot of 'em."

On the stage. Perhaps he knew or had heard of David Hameldon.

"'Ere we are!" said Mrs. Maggs, cheerfully, and breathing hard. She opened a door and switched on a light.

The room had that mausoleum look, with its white bed, cold mirror, black iron fireplace, marble-top washstand, unromantic toilet set and worn linoleum. On one wall Queen Victoria was heavily seated over a crowd of racial representatives in many colonies, who acclaimed her Jubilee. On the other wall was *Love Locked Out*.

"You see, it's nice and modern-like, with a gas-fire and ring. And here's a little cupboard, where you can keep your pots and a kettle, if you want to look after yourself, as my young ladies all do. There's a shilling-in-the-slot meter. The bathroom's on the second floor, and I charge twopence for the geyser, if you want it hot. It's a nice little room, isn't it? An' you're not overlooked, which is something, these days."

Diana agreed it was a nice little room, although it struck a chill in her heart after her own chintz-cheery little den at home, with its distant view of the Trent valley and the mauve folds of the Charn-

wood Hills. But this room would look better after her own things were put out. The real attraction, however, was Mrs. Maggs. Diana liked the little woman. She was human and cheerful.

"How much is this room, Mrs. Maggs?" asked Diana.

"Well, I'd ask you, dearie, a pound," she said, in a tone that made Diana wonder whether the rent had been raised or reduced for her. "Breakfast is a shilling a time extra, but all my young ladies get their own. I'm just as pleased, for my legs aren't what they were. I get Mr. Moulton his breakfast, but, then, Mr. Moulton is a gentleman, so he has 'is in bed. He's the only gent I have at present, but it's nice to 'ave a man in the house, isn't it? Not that I see much of 'im. He gets in about two, and potters around until twelve."

"I think I'll take this room. Can I have it at once?" asked Diana.

Mrs. Maggs glanced at her swiftly.

"Yes—but as you've no luggage I'd 'ave to ask you to pay a week in advance. You see I don't generally take nobody in a hurry, dearie. It's often suspicious-like. Not that I'm suggesting——"

"I'll gladly pay you for a month, if you wish," said Diana.

Mrs. Maggs looked at her calmly for a few moments.

"I suppose you're new to London, dearie? It's nice to be trusting, an' I like to be trusted, but don't ever do that in London. What if the place was burnt or was nasty and you wanted to go? No, dearie, I only ask for the first week. Have you a box?"

"Yes, but I left it at the station until I found somewhere. I've my pajamas and some things in this," said Diana, lifting up her attaché case.

Mrs. Maggs gave a crackling laugh, and turned down the sheets.

"You'll get on with Miss Carmen below, you will. She wears them new things. 'Mrs. Maggs,' she says one night, 'did you ever wear pajamas?' 'No,' says I, 'an' never will!' And what do you think she did?—she made me wear a pair—silk, too! But I got up in the middle of the night and got into my nightie. I felt indecent-like in them things. Besides, I like something to wrap round me legs. Oh, you'll get on with Miss Carmen, you will! She's a nice girl, she is. Now, I'll fetch you some hot water, dearie, and I'll put a bottle in the bed, though it's well aired."

She bustled out of the room. Diana lit the gas and spread her few things on the dressing-table. With the fire glowing the room looked cosier at once. She felt she was going to be comfortable with Mrs. Maggs.

II

At seven o'clock Diana went out to get something to eat. She returned about nine with her trunk, which the landlady helped to carry upstairs.

"You 'aven't told me your name, dearie," said Mrs. Maggs before she went.

"Diana Delaney."

"Miss Diana Delaney. My, that's a pretty name! Is it your own?"

Diana cast a startled look at the old lady.

"Eh, you mustn't be surprised at my saying that.

'Eaps of 'em no more own their own names than they do their own hair! They have to be striking on the stage. I suppose Mr. Moul't's his own, or he'd pick something a bit more 'ealthy while he was doing it."

"Have you many people on the stage here?"

"Only two now—Mr. Moul't and Miss Cherry Carmen. Miss Penn-Porter's an artist, and Miss Jerningham, who's next door here, is a day nurse. I haven't asked what you do, miss?"

Diana was embarrassed a moment. She was unprepared for such a question.

"Oh—I'm going to take up something. I've just left home," she said.

"Well, now! That's not easy, is it, specially a good 'ome, as I see you've 'ad by your nice things all about? Is there anything else you want, Miss Delaney?"

"No, thank you—oh, unless you'd mind, I think I shall not want those pictures."

"Certainly, dearie. The Queen's a bit old-fashioned now, though I don't hold with all this sneering at her, just because she knew her own mind," said Mrs. Maggs, taking down the Jubilee picture. She passed to *Love Locked Out*, and contemplated the naked boy for a moment. "I always liked this picture. It doesn't do to shut 'im out. But 'e's a naughty little brat, and just ready for spanking, too!"

With the pictures under her arm and a last "Good night, dearie," she went.

At half-past ten, just as Diana began to prepare for bed, there was a sharp knock on her door. She was tired at the end of this momentous day, and her

nerves were ridiculously sensitive. For a few moments she stood with held breath, thinking a dozen wild thoughts. The knock was repeated, imperatively. Hastily putting on her dressing-gown, Diana went to the door, opened it slightly, and then, seeing it was a girl of about her own age, all her fear vanished.

"I'm awfully sorry, but have you got a match? I've walked round my room like a hot bear and simply can't find a box!"

The speaker was a girl of about twenty-two, with marvelously dark eyes. Diana liked her at once.

"Won't you come in—I'll get you a box," she said.

The stranger came into the room. Diana now saw she was a long-legged person, graceful as a gazelle. Everything about her seemed to dart—her eyes, her speech, the way in which she gave her head a sudden turn, fluffing out her bobbed black hair. She took the proffered box of matches with the same quick gesture.

"You look very comfy," she said, glancing round. "I've not seen you before. How long have you been here?"

"I only came to-night—won't you sit down," said Diana, offering her the only chair.

"I'll stand, thanks. This is not a bad hole, as holes like this go. I can see you're just new to the game."

"What game—why?" asked Diana.

"Rooming in lodgings, or you wouldn't spread your silver brushes out the first night for some one to steal."

"But isn't every one honest?" queried Diana, dismayed.

"As it happens here, yes—but your luck's in. I lost a pair of silk stockings once a week in the last place. My name's Cherry Carmen. What's yours?"

"Diana Delaney."

"Good God!—what a name to screen with!" exclaimed Miss Carmen.

"To what?"

"Screen—film, old thing. What do you do?"

"I'm looking for work."

"God help you!—that's my profession," exclaimed Miss Carmen.

"But you're an actress, aren't you?" asked Diana.

"When they're willing. I've had seven weeks work in six months, and I'm still virtuous, despite the parson's warning about the world, the flesh and the stage-door."

She suddenly stared hard at Diana, and then roughly turned her towards the light.

"You've been crying! Take my advice. Cry bucketsful if you must, but never let any one know. A red-eyed woman's as much chance as a salted snail. Moreover, there isn't a man in the world worth crying about!"

"It wasn't about a man," said Diana, quickly.

"That's worse, you shouldn't cry about anything else. Well, Cherry Carmen's off to bed when she's ironed out her handkerchiefs. Come and have breakfast with me in the morning. I'm awful without my teeth and my transformation, but my coffee's famous. So long!"

The door closed with a slam.

19037

CHAPTER V

WITH the passing of a month, in which she had desperately searched for work, Diana felt the approach of panic. Her resources were dwindling. She now had five pounds left out of the twenty. Already she had economized in food. She ate scantily in places that would have revolted her a month before, amid tired, churlish waitresses, and poor spirit-broken clerks supplementing their orders with little packets brought in from suburban homes. She noticed their turned collars and cuffs, the women's re-trimmed hats and grease-tipped gloves—all the shameless witnesses to heroic tragedy played out on a mean stage. Often, swaying in those earthy underground trains, or fighting her way to a wet seat on a bus top, she marveled at their courage to carry on. But, like herself, the spur of desperation drove on the flagging spirit.

When deliverance came, in the fifth week, it was not at her own hands. The girls in the house had been wonderful to her. Cherry Carmen, still without work, but still without fear, came in and out of her room, cheery, bullying her into optimism. Nor did her service end with words. Often she had taken off Diana's wet shoes and stockings, had made her a quick meal of tea and toast, insisting that Diana should have it in her room. Diana knew why. The gas meter ate up her shillings.

Mrs. Maggs, too, was not unaware of the battle on the third-floor-back.

"Is that you, Miss Delaney? Come down a minute. Don't it smell good? Eh, how my 'usband loved apple pie! 'E was a Shropshire lad—lived among apples all 'is life till he came to London. 'E thought in apples—called me the apple of 'is eye, apple-cheeked, and, later on, mind you, his apple-dumpling. Now take a bit up while it's hot. You can't get it like this in them shops, though it is me as says it."

It was Miss Penn-Porter, the artist, who ended Diana's nightmare. She was a sweet little creature, of—but her age was a mystery no one could solve, and opinion varied from thirty to fifty. The tragic narrative of her life was that a mere boy of twenty-two had been madly in love with her, and that she had refused him because she could not bring herself to tell him her real age. Fiction or fact, Penelope Penn-Porter was a living testimonial to an hour's nightly exercise with creams and face-massage. Time wrote no wrinkles on her hazeled brow.

She had been drawing a portrait of young Sir Lionel Glent, D.S.O., blinded in the War, and happened to hear Lady Glent, his mother, say she wanted some one to do a little secretarial work, and to read to her son. Miss Penn-Porter had immediately told her she thought she knew such a person, with the result that Diana went to Cadogan Square, the next morning, for an interview with Lady Glent. She had left the house half an hour later with a position worth three pounds a week. Her duties were to begin at ten o'clock and end at five. She would be given lunch in the house.

Diana could never remember walking from Cadogan Square. Spiritual levitation must have

transported her into Knightsbridge at half-past eleven on that sharp, clear November morning. It was the anniversary of Armistice Day, too, which perhaps accounted for its miraculous nature. For as she passed Hyde Park Corner, halting where the cars filed out through one of the gates into Piccadilly, her heart beat madly within her. There, on the opposite pavement, waiting as she was waiting, stood David Hameldon!

Her sudden joy gave place to fear, fear that he might not see her, then fear that he might not know her. They had not seen each other by daylight.

When the traffic ceased and they could cross, Diana had to master an impulse to speak. The training of years just would not permit her to accost a young man, however much her heart cried out to him. How fresh and trim he looked this morning, with his bowler hat, black-and-white striped collar, silk tie and pearl pin. He wore a smartly cut double-breasted navy greatcoat, and carried a slim umbrella tucked under one arm. His hat was stuck jauntily on his head. She noticed again his black, clearly defined eyebrows, and the olive tan of his square face.

They must pass now. He was level with her and still did not see her. And then, as if impelled by her desire, he swerved right and glimpsed her. The next second, recovering from surprise, he greeted her eagerly.

"Diana!—Miss Delaney!" he cried. And Diana, forgive her, pretended to be startled also by this young man calling her name.

"You remember me, Miss Delaney?—at the Goose Fair—David Hameldon?" he cried, removing his hat and holding out one hand, which she took.

He had flushed with delight and looked at her with youth's shining eyes.

"Oh—it's Mr. Hameldon!" said Diana. "Of course I remember you. How nice to see you again!"

Nice! Foolish, overworked, inadequate word, thought Diana.

"You in London—how wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"But I've seen you every day!"

"Me—where?" she asked, astonished.

He laughed, and she remembered his teeth, which she had first noticed in the Fair.

"That's my little fantasy. Shall I show you?" he asked.

How lovely she was, looking at him with that slightly bewildered air. There was an innocence, a virginal sweetness about her that he had never forgotten. Her eyes were those he had carried in his memory for weeks, blue, with a light and depth in which he felt lost. He had told himself the night, the excitement, had added enchantment to her face, but now, in pitiless day, she stood revealed, triumphantly lovely. It was not a weak prettiness, nor a flawless beauty. There was animation in her look, a boyish venturesomeness that had a Puck-like appeal. He felt her to be a baffling mixture of entrancing shyness and audacity. Evidently she had forgiven him that snatched kiss—perhaps had forgotten it.

"You're in here," he said, gently touching her arm and leading her through the gateway. She saw a large open space with railings and trees beyond. A brown riding track ran down to the left of them, parallel with an avenue of leafless trees.

"You know Hyde Park, of course?" he asked, as they passed by the gate-keeper's lodge before crossing the open bend of the roadway.

"No—it's my first time here," she said.

He gave a cry of joy, and linked his arm in hers to pilot her across.

"Do you know, Diana—may I call you, Diana?" he asked, interrupting himself and looking at her appealingly.

"Yes, David," she answered, quietly, and felt his arm tighten on hers.

"Do you know, I've been here day after day just to look at you. I'm not far from here, and when I couldn't endure it any longer——"

"Endure what?" she interjected.

"Thinking about you, and if ever we should meet again, Diana."

"That was foolish of you. We might never have met," she said.

"I don't believe it—I can't! If two people long to see each other and——"

This young man was very impetuous, reflected Diana. She could not resist interrupting him with "Two people?"

"I'm sorry!" he said, chastened immediately. "I hoped that perhaps you hadn't forgotten me. It's silly, I know."

"I just love your silliness. Go on!" she pleaded.

He stopped in his walk and looked at her with a glance that was a caress. Then he went on again, and they reached an asphalted slope, trifurcated with broad paths. They turned to the left, down an avenue of lime trees, between the riding track and the ornamental lawns.

"That's the Achilles statue, and this is Rotten Row," he explained.

A gentleman with two small children in jodhpurs rode by. The empty chairs and leafless trees had a wintry appearance, but in summer Diana knew it must be enchanting.

"David, you haven't explained why you came here day after day. You couldn't possibly have seen me—I've never been here before."

He hurried her along, making no reply, then with a brisk halt, he swung her round towards the railed-in lawn on their right.

"Look!" he said, eagerly.

Diana looked. She saw a little woodland of trees, fringed with dense banks of rhododendrons, and a green sward, with empty flower beds set in it. There, in the middle of the lawn, she saw a slim figure, holding a bow with arrow poised for flight.

"Oh!" she cried, his fantasy made clear. "It's Diana!"

He removed his hat and shook back his hair with a joyous gesture.

"There—that's how I consoled myself! I can never forget you while that's there. I feel you're like that. P'raps I'm Actæon, and you're going to shoot that arrow through my heart because I've seen you. But I wouldn't mind. It would be a jolly death. That figure's etched in my brain, its alluring roundness, its tense physical ecstasy. It's pagan and bronze, and the thought of you clothes it with life and warmth. You can see now, Diana, why I came here and thought of you!"

She could not reply. She saw its loveliness, but it was his words, poured forth so generously in

tribute to her, that left her mute. This was the first open tribute she had known. It came impetuous as a torrent and carried her recklessly on in its ardent course. It was too extravagant to trust, she knew that. But she let herself be swept along with his infectious spirit, he was something so extraordinary in her life.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, anxiously, as she continued to gaze at the statue in silence.

"David—it's beautiful. And it's generous of you to link me with it. I shall never see it without thinking of you now."

She raised her face to him, and they looked in each other's eyes in that unseeing, all-feeling rapture which is the oldest and yet the newest wonder of the human race. So near were their faces, so unconscious the act that brought their lips together, the kiss born of that moment had no physical birth. They looked at each other again, trembling, wordless. They stood in the leafless winter, but for them it was summer. They heard a chirping of the birds, the dull sea-sound of traffic beyond the Park, and then, coming nearer, the soft padding of hoofs on the track. Had they but known, in that fled moment their youth had touched its peak.

The rider in the Row, coming nearer, brought back the world. They turned away from the Diana statue.

"When may I see you again?" asked David, as they crossed towards the gate. Her practical mind was now wishing he would suggest their lunching together. She was so weary of those solitary lunches, and this was her last free lunch-time. Doubtless he had an engagement. Possibly he was

a very popular person. He had all the attractive qualities of a good fellow. It was strange how little she really knew about him or he about her. They had not discussed their own affairs, so absorbing had been their unquestioning interest in each other. Perhaps this singularity occurred to him, for as they neared the gate, when asking her to meet him again, he added—

"Every day, as long as you are here, Diana!"

"I'm here for good," she answered.

He stared at her in surprise.

"For good—you've come to live in London? Oh, that's wonderful!"

But the moment he had expressed his delight she saw a change in his eyes. They were darkened, as when a cloud-shadow travels over a sunlit plain.

"Yes—I've left home," answered Diana. Should she tell him? He was not unconnected with her great adventure, in a manner he little guessed. Something in the tone of her answer must have aroused his curiosity, for he asked—

"Why have you left home?"

She told him everything, even of her engagement that morning.

"So it's all come right. Oh, David, I love London!" she cried.

He seemed very serious all at once. Watching her face closely, filling in the blanks in her story of these five weeks in London, his admiration of her courage was mixed with regret.

"Diana—I feel terribly to blame. I kept you out that night. Now you've no home," he said.

"It would have happened—later, if not then," she assured him. "And I never intended pining

away in a vicarage. I am happier here. This life is so full of possibilities, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said, failing to hide the half-heartedness of his response. "But London is a hard place for a lonely girl."

"You are an optimist!" said Diana, spiritedly.

He laughed then, and grew more cheerful, seeing her undaunted air.

"Well, if anybody can win through, you will!" he said, smiling at her fondly. "And you needn't feel lonely any more—that's if you'll let me see you again?"

The light in her eyes gave her answer.

"It's funny, isn't it—but I know nothing about you yet!" laughed Diana. "We haven't even been introduced!"

"Allow me, Miss Delaney, to present Mr. David Hameldon. How d'you do, Miss Delaney, charmed to meet you!"

"How d'you do, Mr. Hameldon—I've heard so much about you!" retorted Diana.

They laughed merrily at that, and the policeman on point duty glanced at them enviously.

"Little liar!" murmured David, affectionately.

"Mysterious humbug!" replied Diana.

To her surprise he seemed a little startled by her retort, for his eyes just perceptibly opened.

"You don't really think I'm a humbug?" he asked, earnestly.

"Idiot!" she whispered, fondly.

They were opposite Apsley House.

"I'm lunching in Piccadilly—at a club. It's an awful nuisance. If only I'd known. Let us lunch

together to-morrow. I want to ask you all sorts of things," he said.

She saw he had to leave her now, and stopped.

"I'm sorry, I can't. You see, it's my first day at Lady Glent's. I can't ask to be away the first time. I suppose you're busy every night at the theater?"

"The theater? Oh, yes!" he replied, jerkily. "But we must meet to-morrow, Diana. Can't you come out for a little while after lunch? You must get some air. We'll walk in the Park. What number is it, Cadogan Square?"

"Oh, you mustn't come there!" said Diana at once. "It wouldn't do, would it? Let's meet by our statue at two o'clock."

He agreed to that, and they said "Good-by" reluctantly. It was only after he was gone that Diana realized neither knew the address of the other. But to-morrow, in their long talk, she would learn every-thing.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. MAGGS was the first person at George Street to be told the news of her post. Diana ran down to her in the basement kitchen.

"Ay, my dear, that's wonderful. But I knew you'd soon find something to do. You can't tell me that a pretty little thing like yourself's going begging for long," she said. "I'm sure as soon as he set his eyes on you he told 'is mother you'd do!"

"But, Mrs. Maggs, how could he—Sir Lionel's blind?"

"Maybe, but love ain't. Blind as a bat, they say, but the bats go on mating, don't they, dearie? An' a title too! Well, there's nothing like a 'andle to your name. There's bin less wonders in this street. That Goderidge girl, as brazen a chit as ever showed her legs in a chorus, is a Countess, if you please, with her old mother still letting off her two front floors."

"Mrs. Maggs, you're incurably romantic," laughed Diana. "And you're all wrong about Sir Lionel Glent. He didn't see me. Also, it would be no use if he fell down and worshiped me to-morrow!"

Mrs. Maggs looked up sharply from her chair, where she sat darning Mr. Moults' socks. Diana had not meant to say so much, and could not hide her confusion.

"You don't mean to say, dearie, there's a——"

"I've not the slightest intention of fastening myself to any one, thank you," interrupted Diana, spiritedly.

"So you're like all the rest of 'em, eh," observed Mrs. Maggs. "I don't know what's come over the younger generation, I'm sure I don't. There's Mr. Moulton, as nice a-looking a young gentleman as any girl could wish to be kissed by. 'Mr. Moulton,' says I, when he brought me down these socks, 'why don't you get a nice little wife to mend these things for you?' 'Mrs. Maggs,' says he at once, 'it's cheaper to buy new socks than to keep a wife to mend them, and women bore me.' Now, what do you think of that—bore 'im! I almost said, but I remembered my place, 'Ay, my lad, and a woman bore you too, and fed you, and dressed you, and thought you the most beautiful thing in the world, when most likely you looked more like a boiled lobster than a human being.' But I didn't say that, of course. There's Miss Carmen, too—she's just as offhand about it! Well, they'll think different one of these days, p'r'aps."

"It's an economic problem, Mrs. Maggs. People simply cannot afford to get married these days," said Diana.

"Afford, dearie, afford!" cried the old lady, indignantly. "I often wonder what income Adam and Eve had when he put the question. Young folks in love get married first and get careful afterwards. That's how it should be. My 'usband and I had nothin' but worry and bills all our days, but I'd have every one of 'em over again. Do you want any 'ot water, dearie?" added Mrs. Maggs, coming

down to earth again. "Me kettle's on the boil if you do."

Diana took her hot water upstairs. In her joy she could not help tapping at Cherry Carmen's door, in case she was there.

"Come in!" said a tired voice.

Diana opened the door and was astonished to find the room in darkness. She stood on the threshold a moment.

"Cherry——"

"I'm here. Turn on the light. I've been sitting in the gloaming," said Cherry Carmen. There was irony in the voice.

Diana switched on the light. Cherry sat in her chair, opposite the grate. The room was cold.

"Why, you haven't lit the fire!" cried Diana.

Cherry gave a short laugh.

"Can't, my dear," she said.

There was something in her voice, her manner, so unlike the buoyant Cherry Carmen who had cheered her all these weary weeks, Diana stared at her for a moment. Was it possible she had been crying, her eyes were reddish.

"The meter's bone dry," said Cherry.

Diana immediately went over to her, and falling on her knees, put her arms around the girl.

"Cherry—you don't mean you haven't a shilling, you've——"

One glance from Cherry told her the truth.

"I'm right up against it, my dear, that's all."

"Cherry—why didn't you tell me? Listen, I've wonderful news—I've got a job, a splendid job. I begin to-morrow!"

Diana told her all that had happened at Cadogan Square.

"Good for you, Diana. My luck's out. Nothing doing anywhere. Seventeen weeks now. God! how I hate London!"

Diana rose to her feet, went to the slot-meter, put a shilling in, and lit the fire.

"You won't get that back!" laughed the other girl.

"Cherry darling, don't laugh like that. You know I don't want it back. What have you had to eat?" asked Diana.

"Plenty, thanks."

"When?"

"The last meal, of course."

"I don't believe you've had anything to eat, Cherry!"

The girl gave a queer, bitter smile.

"Di, you sound like the Waif's Home."

"Put your hat on, we're going out for dinner," said Diana.

"No, we're not," retorted Cherry, "you've to last out a week yet before you draw your salary. I'm all right. There's always one thing a girl like me can do."

"What?"

Cherry threw her a defiant look.

"That!" she said, briefly.

Diana stood silent a moment under the shock of it. She knew Cherry didn't mean it, was desperate and talking wildly. But it was terrible to hear her hard, hopeless voice.

"Cherry, you're talking nonsense. Put on your

hat. I'm dreadfully hungry, and I'm not moving until you do "

Diana was relieved to see her friend get up, and go to the mirror and powder her face. So long as a woman powdered her face there was hope. After that she put on her hat, and they left the room together.

"Lord! I wish we could go out by the window," she said.

"Why?"

"I hate going down those stairs. I haven't paid Mrs. Maggs for three weeks. The old dear hasn't said a word!"

Diana made a swift calculation. She had five pounds left. Three pounds for Cherry's room, one pound four shillings for their dinners, six nights at two shillings a head. Balance, sixteen shillings for dinner to-night, and laundry! Yes, she could do it comfortably.

"You can pay Mrs. Maggs as we go down," said Diana. "Wait till I take this hot water to my room. I'll not be a minute."

Diana rushed out. She had left the five pounds at the back of the frame on her dressing-table, with her mother's photograph. Hastily she took the notes out, and went down to Cherry's room again.

"There," she said, forcing three pounds into her hand, "settle with Mrs. Maggs as you go down."

"Di, you must think I'm very tame!" exclaimed Cherry, trying to thrust back the notes.

"I'm thinking nothing, Cherry dear. The first time I saw you I liked you, and I lent you a box of matches. The more I've seen of you the more I've liked you, so p'r'aps you'll let me lend you some-

thing of value. I'd have cried myself to sleep many a night but for you. Don't let's be silly about this, Cherry. Come along!"

Diana gave her no opportunity for reply, hurrying down the stairs. At the bottom she waited while her friend went into the kitchen to pay Mrs. Maggs. She was not long and they went out into George Street, where Diana did something that amazed Cherry Carmen. She waved her stumpy umbrella at a taxi-driver, who pulled up to the curb.

"What on earth——" began Cherry.

"Jump in," cried Diana, imperatively, and turned to the taxi-driver—"Fullers, Regent Street."

"My dear, has your American uncle died?" asked Cherry, as Diana sat down beside her.

"Haven't got one."

"Thought he'd left you an oil well," said Cherry.

"We're both dead tired, and oh, Cherry dear, I feel my luck's turned. We'll have a nice dinner!"

Cherry Carmen looked closely at Diana. Never before had she seen her in such high spirits. Her eyes were shining with love of life.

"I say, Di—are you quite sure that baronet-boy's blind?" she asked.

"Don't be silly. It wasn't him I saw."

"Then there is some one?"

Diana hesitated a moment, and then, slipping her arm through Cherry's—

"Oh, Cherry darling, I simply must tell you—but keep it to yourself!" she said. And the story of David and Diana was not finished when the taxicab pulled up in Regent Street.

CHAPTER VII

I

AT five minutes to ten Diana stood on the steps of Lady Glent's house in Cadogan Square, having rung the bell. She was excited and nervous, so nervous that she had even pretended to be walking straight past the house, and had made a swift turn up the steps, in case the servants in the basement or any one in the upper windows should see her and be discussing her while she waited to be admitted.

A page-boy opened the door, diminutive, and oh, so calm, observed Diana. He treated her with the mingled deference and superiority of a Court chamberlain, or as Diana imagined a Court chamberlain treated one.

"Will you please come this way, miss," he said, with a slight tilt of his sleek young head, and led the way up the stairs. They mounted soundlessly on the thick blue pile. At the interview with Lady Glent, Diana had been shown into a sitting-room on the ground floor at the back. She was now ushered into an L-shaped drawing-room, with double windows and balcony. There was a grand piano in one corner. A divan stood across the front of the fireplace, in which a fire glowed cheerfully.

"Will you please be seated, her ladyship will be here immediately," said the boy, so butlerishly formal that Diana had to repress a smile. From her seat on the divan she surveyed the room. The

windows were hung with lace curtains, and crimson damask hangings, which matched the cushions of the *Bergère* chairs. On the piano, in a large silver frame, was a photograph of Lady Glent, in Court dress. She was a handsome rather than a beautiful woman, but the photographer had been an imaginative artist. It was obvious that the lens had not done all. Indeed, the Lady Glent she had seen the previous day had looked a tired, rather irritable woman, much older than the photograph.

Diana's eyes turned to the mantelpiece, with some Dresden figures and a fine piece of Lalique. Then she noticed the miniatures on each side of the Venetian mirror. She rose to look at these. Some were of ladies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, others of beaux, soldiers mostly. But one, a modern example, held her attention. It was of a young boy, sloe-eyed, rosy-cheeked, with a mass of wavy hair brushed back from his open, smiling face. He was dressed in kilts and a jersey, chubby-kneed as he sat, one leg doubled under the other. Tucked under one arm was a Sealyham puppy, with bright eyes and alert head. They made an enchanting pair. Could that be Sir Lionel, as a child, she wondered? How terrible if those eyes were now blind!

Her speculation was checked by the sound of the door opening. Diana turned, to see Lady Glent there.

"Good morning, Miss Delaney. You are very punctual," she said, coming into the room. "Being a very unpunctual person, it's a quality that I much admire. Won't you sit down?"

Lady Glent seated herself and looked critically at

her secretary. The girl was pretty, very pretty. If her son had not been blind she would have thought twice about bringing so attractive a person into the house. Lionel had an extraordinary capacity for falling in love. Poor boy, he was terribly frustrated now.

"You'll gradually get into your duties. I want you to check the household accounts, Miss Delaney. Quite between us, my butler is very irregular. He's such a good butler that I've put up with it. If it isn't one thing it's another. There's a little room up on the fourth floor which you can make your office. I'll arrange for a telephone connection to be made, to save you running up and down stairs. I forgot to ask you yesterday whether you are willing to travel? That, of course, is essential. We spend the spring and the autumn at Dunetree, our country place, and we generally take a villa at Nice for the New Year."

"I should be quite ready to go anywhere, Lady Glent."

"Do you speak French?"

"Oh, yes—I was at school in France for a year."

Lady Glent looked at her meditatively. She had not quite placed this clergyman's daughter. A clergyman might be anything, high-born or low-incomed. She wondered whether independence, necessity or boredom had made the girl go out into the world.

"If you'll come along," said Lady Glent, rising, "I'll show you your room."

Diana followed Lady Glent upstairs to a back room. It was sparsely but comfortably furnished,

with a desk and typewriter and a number of letter files.

"I'll open my letters each morning and let you have those I want answering. Sir Lionel will also want you to attend to his correspondence. He has taught himself to type, but you'll have to read his letters for him," said Lady Glent. "If you want anything more, ask the butler, Johnson."

Diana found plenty to occupy her attention until half-past twelve. She was hoping every minute that she would be summoned by Sir Lionel, for she was now eager to see him. Already in her mind she had resolved to make herself indispensable to that poor young man. Of all afflictions blindness was, to her, the most terrible.

When, after a discreet tap, the door opened and the page-boy entered, she hoped it was a summons to Sir Lionel's room.

"Please, miss, her ladyship wants to see you in the drawing-room," he said.

"Thank you—what is your name?" asked Diana.

"Pennyfoot, miss, but I'm called Tuppence," he said with a grin.

So the child could smile, observed Diana.

"You're called what?"

"Tuppence, miss. Sir Lionel says that if I'm a Pennyfoot, with two feet I must be worth twopence. So he calls me Tuppence. Sir Lionel's full of jokes, miss, and we 'umor 'im."

Diana laughed, as much at the patronage as the nickname.

"I suppose you're all fond of poor Sir Lionel?"

"Oh, yes, miss. But you mustn't let him 'ear you

call him 'poor.' He hates being pitied. We all get on with him, he isn't like his mother."

Diana felt she should check this gossip, but she could not resist asking why.

"Oh—'er ladyship gets real bad at times," said the boy, solemnly.

"Bad?" echoed Diana. She must really encourage no more after this.

The boy said nothing, but to Diana's amazement he raised a closed hand, threw his head back and smacked his lips. After this demonstration he looked knowingly at Diana to see whether she had comprehended.

"You'd better run along," said Diana, curtly, regretting the confidence she had provoked.

Down in the drawing-room she found Lady Glent dressed for going out.

"Oh, Miss Delaney, I am lunching at my sister's at Richmond, and I want to take you along with me. She's very interested in a Children's Welfare center, and I'd like you to give her a little help sometimes. Will you get your things? The car's waiting."

Diana went back to her room for her hat and coat. Lunch at Richmond! They could not possibly be back at two o'clock. At two o'clock she was to meet David by the statue.

For a moment she thought she would ask Lady Glent to excuse her. But how could she explain that she wished to meet a young man in the Park at two o'clock? What would she think, and on her first day. No, it was not possible.

Hiding her dismay, she went down to Lady Glent and followed her into the limousine. At any other

time she would have enjoyed this experience, riding through the London streets in a beautifully appointed car, but now her thoughts were of David, of what David would do when he had waited and waited, and she had not come. She was further dismayed by the fact that she did not know his address, so she could not send him any explanation. They might never meet again, unless he had happened to remember the name of her employer.

Lady Glent, receiving only monosyllabic replies to her comments, gave up talking. Possibly the girl was more shy than stupid. She was certainly pretty. Perhaps she had made an error in expecting brains as well. The combination was rare.

II

Their hostess, the house, the lunch, each would have delighted Diana except for her miserable pre-occupation concerning David. It was half-past one when they sat down at the table, and three o'clock before Lady Glent showed any sign of leaving. Actually, it was four o'clock when they arrived back at Cadogan Square.

"When you've been to your room come down to my son's," said Lady Glent, in the hall, "we shall have tea there and you can meet him."

A few minutes later, Diana tapped at the door on the ground floor, which she had been told was Sir Lionel's sitting-room. There was no response, and she was about to tap again when a young footman opened the door, and looked questioningly at her.

"I'm Miss Delaney. Lady Glent asked me to——"

"Ask Miss Delaney in, Hilton!" called a voice at once.

Diana passed into the room. It was a long room with windows looking out on to the street, comfortably furnished, with deep heavy chairs, bookshelves and tables. There was a grand-pianola, a gramophone and a wireless cabinet. From the size of a number of books piled up on the tables, Diana concluded they were volumes in Braille. There was a rack of pipes, well-filled. As she entered, taking in all this at a glance, two dogs, a Sealyham and a Dandie Dinmont, jumped up and barked excitedly.

"Be quiet, Thingummy! Down, Jingummy, you idiot! Come in, Miss Delaney. Excuse my badly behaved dogs. Mother will be here in a minute. How d'you do?"

Diana saw advancing towards her, having risen from his chair, a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with fair, wavy hair. Despite the small, clipped mustache, she knew in a moment he was the original of the miniature. The boy in kilts had altered very little in features. He had the same open brow, pleasant face and fair hair, brushed back severely, but triumphantly wavy about the temples. For the moment, so easy and certain was his manner, so clear the eyes, she quite forgot he was blind. She was reminded of his affliction by the fact that, in holding out his hand to her, it was a little high. He was quite six foot in stature, but so well proportioned that it was not noticeable.

"Won't you sit down? I hear I am going to victimize you. I'm afraid it's awful rot I shall want you to read to me," he said.

He waited until she had sat down before he seated

himself. The dogs began to be friendly to her.

"I don't mind what I read if it will give you pleasure," said Diana. Was it really possible he was blind? There seemed to be no blemish in him.

"May I smoke?" he asked, fingering his pipe and taking a tobacco jar from a table near his left hand.

"Oh, certainly, I rather like the smell of tobacco," said Diana.

How marvelously he had put his hand on that jar!

"I've been pampered, you see. Everybody spoils me," he said.

There was a pause. Diana felt she must say something.

"What singular names you've given the dogs," she said.

He laughed, and pulled one of them by the ear.

"Yes, that's Thingummy, and this is Jingummy," he answered, and as if anticipating her unspoken question—

"I know them by their fur, their bark, and also by the fact that Thingummy sits on my right and Jingummy on my left. They're really clever kids, Miss Delaney. They can distinguish their names infallibly."

"Thingummy!" he whispered, and the dog on his right pricked up its ears.

"Jingummy!" he whispered again. This time the dog on his left cocked its head.

"Did they do it?" he asked, eagerly.

"Oh, yes, the darlings!" cried Diana.

He was so boyish and cheerful that Diana felt a tightness in her throat. He was about thirty, thought Diana. He must have been quite young

when he was blinded at Arras. Again as if in anticipation of her thoughts, he said—

"You mustn't treat me like an invalid, Miss Delaney. I can hear folks pitying me in their voices. I'm quite happy. It was terrible at first—when I knew I should never see again. But I've got used to that. It's surprising what you can do without. I was the most awful dunce when I was blinded, just a silly puppy of twenty. Since then I've learned French, Italian, Spanish, and German, and I can sing all kinds of things out of the operas—I shan't inflict them on you! But I won't let myself brood. That's fatal. Now, if only they'd let me ride—— Hello, here's mother!"

Lady Glent came into the room, and following her, a footman carrying tea, which he set out on a little folding table in front of the fire. The sense of luxury surrounded everything in this house, and Diana found herself reflecting on the irony of life, which gave this young man so much—wealth, youth and good looks, and had denied the vital thing that mattered. She shuddered at the thought of those poor blind creatures who had poverty to contend with in their darkness. Their tribulation instilled in her a spirit of thankfulness for the unthought-of mercy of sight.

"And how's Aunt Janet, mother?" asked Sir Lionel, as Lady Glent poured out tea.

"Full of her Welfare work," replied his mother.

"Poor old aunt—last month it was Girl Guides. The month before it was the Reformed Church; before that it was the Housing for the Poor Guild; and before that Heliotherapy for Crippled Children. One day she'll go off on a mission to the

Lepers in Central Africa, and then we'll be happy!"

"Leo—how can you be so cruel to your aunt?" protested his mother.

He laughed boyishly and turned towards Diana.

"Would you believe it, Miss Delaney—Aunt Janet came here one day and told me seeing was a matter of believing. I'd heard the proverb before—but not applied like that! Yes, I'd only to say I could see, and I could see! But I couldn't see that!"

"Your aunt gets carried away, Leo, but she's a good heart," said Lady Glent.

"That's a kind way of saying she's a soft head, mother. At our last interview she solemnly assured me that bad thoughts made bad weather. With a general election coming on, we're in for a terrible winter!"

Lady Glent changed the conversation. She wished Lionel would not discuss relations in front of strangers. She had successfully changed the conversation to the subject of dogs, on which Sir Lionel was immediately enthusiastic, when the footman entered to say she was wanted on the telephone.

"You see, I'm an *enfant terrible*, Miss Delaney," said Sir Lionel, the moment his mother had left the room. "I want you to make me a promise."

"Gladly," answered Diana.

"I say, you are rash! It might be anything!" he laughed.

"Anything reasonable," said Diana.

"Oh, well, it's most reasonable. You're to promise you'll not leave me alone at any time with my Aunt Janet. She's a terror. I know every symptom of the human body. If you don't eat a foot of celery a day you have rheumatism, if you

don't sleep north-south you're out of the rejuvenating polar currents, white bread causes cancer, and black clothes prevent pigmentation—ssh!"

He heard Lady Glent coming long before Diana could detect a sound.

"Leo," said his mother, entering the room, "that was Captain Chilton. He rang up to say he's down with a bad chill and daren't risk going to the theater with you to-night. He's been hoping to go all day, but is worse this evening."

"Then you must come, mother. I simply must see *The Right Idea*. Don't you think Arthur Wargrave's things are marvelous, Miss Delaney?" he asked, eagerly.

"I—I'm afraid I haven't seen them. I've not been to a theater yet," she said.

"What!" cried Sir Lionel.

Diana saw Lady Glent staring at her. Sir Lionel was sitting upright in his chair. It seemed to her that Thingummy and Jingummy had cocked their heads at her.

"You mean you've not been in a London theater?" asked Lady Glent.

"No—I've never been in any theater," said Diana.

"Good Lord! How old are you? Oh, I'm sorry, I shouldn't ask a lady that, should I? I've dreadful manners!" cried Sir Lionel.

Diana smiled, he was so eager in his blunderings.

"I'm just twenty-one. My father is very strict and old-fashioned. He doesn't approve of the theater, and forbade us to go."

"Heavens! I didn't think there was anybody

left like that!" said Sir Lionel. "My word, if he'd tried it on me! I say, I hope you don't think I'm rude, but you've given me a shock. I'd read about things like that, but I never believed they existed."

"That's why I left home," said Diana. "I was locked out."

"What?" asked Lady Glent, alert at once. Diana felt she had blundered.

"Yes, we weren't allowed out after ten o'clock. One night, I was very late, so I found the door locked," explained Diana. "Please don't think my father's crazy. He's a very good father, but we just couldn't make him see that children won't be treated like that to-day. My mother always had to bear the brunt of it whenever we were late, or did something my father didn't like."

"How many were you?" asked Lady Glent.

"Two younger sisters and a brother at home. My eldest sister is married, and I've a brother studying surgery in Paris."

"I say, you have had a rotten time—hasn't she, mother?" said Sir Lionel, sympathetically. "We must make it up to you!"

The kindness in his voice touched Diana. She felt perilously near to tears. He didn't know what she had endured through these nightmare weeks in London, searching for work.

"Leo, I'm sorry I can't go with you to the theater, dear," said his mother, "but Pennyfoot can take you down. I'm dining at Lady Crail's."

"That's all right, mother. Tuppence can take me. I'd go alone, but you get so nervy about your poor blind boy!" laughed Sir Lionel. Suddenly he smacked his hands on the side of his chair.

"I say! Why can't you take me, Miss Delaney?"

"Perhaps Miss Delaney objects to the theater," said Lady Glent, immediately.

"Oh, no—I'd love to go!—that is —" hesitated Diana, seeing that Lady Glent did not share the enthusiasm.

"That's settled it. We'll have dinner and go. You'll just love it—and a Wargrave play, too. That man's a marvel. He wrote his first play at twenty-four and it's running now. They say *The Right Idea* is just as good. It's playing to packed houses."

"But I can't go, Sir Lionel—I'm not dressed," said Diana, still conscious of Lady Glent's disapproval.

"You look topping just as you are—take a blind man's word for it, Miss Delaney!" he replied, joyfully. "You simply must go! Your first theater! Jove! I wish it were mine! I'd burst with excitement! Now you'll let me take you, won't you?"

Diana looked at Lady Glent before answering.

"If you are free this evening, Miss Delaney," said Lady Glent.

"Oh, I'd love to go!" cried Diana. "Thank you so much."

"There, that's settled. We'll dine at seven-thirty and we'll want the car for eight-fifteen—unless you want it, mother?"

"I can send it on from Lady Crail's," said his mother. "Miss Delaney, would you please fetch my glasses from my boudoir, they are on my writing bureau?"

"Certainly, Lady Glent," said Diana, leaving the room, conscious that the errand was an excuse to

get rid of her so that she could talk with her son.

Diana was correct. The door had scarcely closed when Lady Glent spoke to him.

"Leo, I do wish you wouldn't be so quick in taking up people you know nothing about."

"Mother, I think she's charming!" declared Sir Lionel.

"How can you know? She's hardly been in the house five minutes. I knew nothing about that locking-out affair. Fathers don't lock out their daughters for being late home. It might be anything."

"Oh, come now, mother! You're not suggesting——."

"I'm suggesting nothing. I'm merely saying, Leo, that it does not do to be so familiar with servants."

"She's not a servant—how can you say that, mother?"

"Well, my secretary. I'm sure there's not much difference."

"My dear mother—in the first place she's a clergyman's daughter, she speaks like a lady, she—I say, this is really ridiculous!"

"It may be, Leo. But for my sake, I hope you won't be so familiar with her," said Lady Glent, decisively.

"Righto! I suppose we can go to the theater?"

"There's no other choice now, since you've asked her."

Sir Lionel turned his frank smiling face towards his mother.

"I'm glad of that. But for heaven's sake don't you try any of the locking-out business!"

"Whatever do you mean, Leo?"

"Oh, nothing, darling—only I might go off and be as disreputable as Miss Delaney if you did!"

He laughed, put his arms around his mother and kissed her.

III

It must not be charged against Diana that, in her excitement, she forgot David. The mishap in connection with him was there, in her mind, but its acuteness was temporarily softened by the excitement of the evening. She experienced three hours of such enchantment as she had never imagined. There was their delightful dinner together, at that richly set table, with perfect waiting, with Sir Lionel so kind and amusing. For a few moments she was lost in wonderment at his cleverness in eating. She watched his knife and fork exploring the plate, guided by nothing but an acute sense of touch. The things he required were carefully placed so that by long custom he could unerringly take them. It fascinated Diana to see his skill and sturdy independence of help.

At the theater he had to be told the name of the characters as they appeared. For him the play was a heard thing, and it was a severe test of the dramatist's skill.

"That's why I like Wargrave. His dialogue's so brilliant, and he's such an easy command of situations, don't you find it so, Miss Delaney?"

Diana found everything wonderful. She was enchanted. The gilt and crimson upholstered theater, the tiers of seats, boxes, clusters of lights, heavy silken folds of the curtains, the music of the hidden

orchestra, the hush when the curtain rose, the light-flooded stage, with its well-dressed, well-spoken actors and actresses—it was wonderland for Diana. And when the curtain was down between the acts, there was the fascination of the people around. Who were all these well-groomed men and beautifully gowned women? Some of them came and spoke to Sir Lionel. A number of smart young men, who had been with him in the Guards, were as much interested in his companion as in their friend. But Sir Lionel reserved her to himself. Once she had a slight shock. A dark young man, with tanned face contrasting healthily with his snowy dress shirt, stood for a moment at the entrance to the stalls. Diana's heart fluttered. Could it be David? But he turned towards her and she was mistaken. While Sir Lionel chatted with a friend she began to think about David. He, too, was an actor. She must really see him act. He would look marvelous on the stage.

And then it occurred to her that she might ask Sir Lionel if he knew him, since he frequented the theaters. As soon as his friend had gone she asked him.

"Hameldon—David Hameldon?" he repeated. "No—I don't recall seeing any one of that name—is he young?"

"Young—dark—square-faced," explained Diana.

"Ah—I can't go by that—what is his voice like?"

"Oh—he has a beautiful voice—very"—she searched for a word to describe his voice, but failed to find one worthy of it—"very earnest," she said, feebly.

"I thought you hadn't been to the theater?"

"No, I haven't—but I met him—once," said Diana.

"There are such swarms of young actors, Miss Delaney. You see them once, perhaps they are excellent, and then they never appear again. I think this Vance girl's splendid to-night, isn't she?"

Diana agreed that she was. She was certain, though, that Cherry Carmen could be just as good. She told Sir Lionel about her.

"These girls have an awful time," he said, sympathetically. "I know something about it. I was once engaged to a girl on the stage."

Diana looked sharply at that fine head of his, tilted upwards, as ever, as if critically listening to something.

"You were engaged?" she repeated.

"Yes—she—it didn't come to anything. You can't expect any one to put up with a log like me."

He spoke lightly enough, but he could not keep a note of wistfulness out of his voice.

"Oh—I'm so sorry," said Diana, impulsively laying a hand on his arm.

"Thanks," he said, smiling. "But I've come through all right."

He placed one hand over hers, and let it rest there for a few moments, until she withdrew hers, embarrassed.

A bell rang, the orchestra died out, the curtain rose.

Sir Lionel insisted on dropping Diana at George Street. She stood on the pavement watching the car disappear, unable to believe the evening had not

been a dream. Quietly letting herself in, she was surprised to see a light shining downstairs. Mrs. Maggs heard her immediately.

"Is that you, Miss Delaney?" she called. "Won't you come down. I've just made myself a cup of tea. Do 'ave one, dearie."

"You should have gone to bed long ago, Mrs. Maggs," said Diana, reprovingly.

"Ay, I should, for I believe in bein' early. But I knew I shouldn't sleep."

"Are you a bad sleeper?" asked Diana. The old lady took off her reading glasses and tied up a pile of letters, each in its envelope, that was on the table. She placed it in an old cash-box before replying.

"No—I sleep the sleep of the just, dearie, but I've been bothered the last few days. My son's letter 'asn't come, and usually it's regular as clock-work. It's three days due now, and 'e never misses writing once a month."

"Your son—I didn't know you had a son!" cried Diana, taking a teacup from her landlady.

"Ay, bless 'im, that I 'ave. He's with his regiment in India. He's all I've got in the world, bless 'im. Them's 'is letters I've just tied up. I keep 'em all. They're so interesting."

"Oh, you'll get a letter to-morrow," said Diana, cheerfully. "P'r'aps the boat's been delayed."

"Ay, p'r'ap's so, but he's generally so regular. I'll show you 'is photo, dearie."

She unlocked the cash-box and from under the pile of letters lifted out a cabinet-size photograph.

"There—that's my Jim!" she said, proudly.

Diana took the photograph. It was of a smart-

looking lad of about twenty-two, in uniform. The likeness to Mrs. Maggs was unmistakable, despite the difference in the ages of mother and son.

"What a smart-looking boy—you must be proud of him, Mrs. Maggs," said Diana, returning the photograph.

"Ay, that I am. He was always such a good lad to his mother. He's that kind, 'e wouldn't hurt a mouse, dearie. Bless 'im!"

She put the photograph back in the cash-box, and furtively wiped her eyes.

"But that isn't what I called you down about, dearie. There's been Miss Carmen a-seeking you all the evening. What do you think—she's got a job at last, poor thing, on the films."

"On the films!" cried Diana, joyfully. "Why, that's just what she wanted. Where is she now?"

"In bed—she waited up till eleven, but she's got to be up early, she's to go down to Elstree by nine o'clock. I do think it's a shame the way they're going to use her!"

"How?"

"Well, she's in a Limehouse picture, mixed up with a lot of 'eathen Chinese, and she's got to have a cut lip and a black eye. Her!—with her pretty eyes and lovely mouth. An' they call that art!" said Mrs. Maggs, disgustedly.

"Oh, she'll be glad to do anything," asserted Diana.

"Well, it seems to me a rum thing for a beautiful girl like her to be paid for looking a mess. But I always said them films were lacking in artistic taste. It's the low taste of the public, I suppose."

Diana told her of the evening at the theater. Mrs. Maggs listened appreciatively to every detail.

"There, dearie, what did I tell you? He's no more blind than I am—you'll see!" said Mrs. Maggs, prophetically.

CHAPTER VIII

I

AT half-past ten the following morning, as Diana sat typing at the desk in her room at Cadogan Square, there was a tap on her door, and in came Tuppence.

"If you please, miss, there's a gentleman on the 'phone named Hameldon. He says he would like to speak to you."

"Mr. Hameldon!" said Diana, with such eagerness that she knew she had betrayed herself to the sharp-eyed page-boy.

"Yes, miss, he asked if you were here and I told him 'yes.'"

"Thanks, Tuppence, I'll come at once."

Tuppence stood on one side and watched Diana go down the stairs. He was pretty good on those stairs himself, but Miss Delaney had nothing to learn that way. She had gone crimson as he looked at her, which had so aroused his curiosity that he could not resist standing near the cloakroom, where he could hear the conversation within.

"Yes—Miss Delaney speaking," said Diana.

"Is that you, Diana—David Hameldon."

"Oh, David—I'm so glad. I've been terribly worried. I had to go out with Lady Glent yesterday, and didn't get back until four."

"Don't worry about that, Diana. Can you come to-day—at two o'clock?"

"The same place?"

"By the statue."

"Yes, at two o'clock, David."

"Au revoir, Diana."

"Good-by," said Diana, and hung up the receiver.

Tuppence hurried away, but he need not, for Diana stood still by the telephone for a few seconds. It was strange how just his voice excited her. No one else had a voice quite like his—so low, so full of—full of what? thought Diana.

She returned to her room. At one o'clock a servant brought in her lunch. She had seen neither Lady Glent nor Sir Lionel. She asked the footman if they were in.

"Her ladyship isn't coming down to lunch, miss. Sir Lionel's out," he said.

"Oh, I hope Lady Glent isn't ill?"

The footman hesitated and stared at Diana doubtfully.

"No—it isn't exactly that, miss, no more than usual."

Diana looked at his impassive face. First Tuppence, now the footman. Then it must be true. She had hoped it was only a page-boy's gossip.

The man left the room. Diana ate her lunch, and at a quarter to two left the house. When she reached the Diana fountain in Hyde Park, David was there, waiting for her.

"Shall we take a walk by the Serpentine?" he said, after he had greeted her. As they walked down Rotten Row she began to tell him of her distress at their mishap the previous day. David laughed.

"You don't know how guilty I felt," he said.

"Why?"

"I was five minutes late!" he confessed.

"But you knew I'd wait five minutes!" cried Diana.

"Would you?" he asked, with a serious expression.

"Of course. Whatever——" she began, but did not finish the sentence, for he had suddenly encircled her with his arm, and kissed her rapturously.

"Oh, don't, David—some one might see!" she cried.

"Hurrah!" he retorted.

She could not be angry with him, his good humor was so infectious.

"David, do you realize, I really know nothing about you, except that you're an actor?" she said.

"But I'm not, Diana—whatever made you think that?" he asked.

Diana looked at him closely, surprise in her eyes.

"You told me you were touring with a company when I met you at the Goose Fair!"

He laughed, and slipped an arm through hers.

"Oh, you've got it all wrong, Diana," he said, lightly. "I'm secretary to Arthur Wargrave, the dramatist. That's why I was in Nottingham. We tried out *The Right Idea* there, and brought it to London a fortnight ago."

Diana gave a cry, mingled of surprise and delight.

"Why, I saw that play last night! It's wonderful! Sir Lionel took me to see it."

"Sir Lionel? Oh, that's the blind fellow, of course. Do your duties include taking him to the theater?" he asked, a little resentfully.

"Don't be silly, David," said Diana, quickly. "You're not going to be jealous of that poor man—besides, what right have you?"

"None at all, I suppose," he answered quickly.

He took his snub well, she thought, and then regretted it.

"David, you must enjoy being with Mr. Wargrave. Sir Lionel thinks there's no one to equal him to-day."

David winced a little at Sir Lionel's prominence again, but expressed no resentment this time.

"He's clever enough—but he's not easy to work with," he said.

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Temper on edge some days. He's an unhappy devil."

"Unhappy! Good gracious, if I'd had a quarter of his success I'd jump over the moon. What an ungrateful creature!" cried Diana. "Whatever's the matter with him—he's quite young, isn't he?"

"Yes—about twenty-seven."

"Rich?"

"H'm—comfortable, I should say."

"And very, very clever!" emphasized Diana.

David bent down over her and laughed.

"I shall soon be jealous of Wargrave," he said. "He's much more formidable than your blind soldier. But for heaven's sake don't write to him, Diana. I've a terrible time dealing with his love letters."

"I don't know him, and I shouldn't dream of it if I did!" retorted Diana, spiritedly.

"Now! Now! I'm sorry, Diana! I know you wouldn't."

"He's probably a horrid man—his head quite turned by silly women."

David glanced at her, admiring the fire that flashed in her eyes.

"I say—you've got the arrows, all right!" he said.

"What arrows?"

"Diana's!" he laughed. "Wargrave's not a bad sort. It's his weakness that gets him in his messes."

"What kind of messes, David?"

"The worst of all—with women—he's now engaged to a girl he finds he doesn't care for."

"Why doesn't he break it off?"

"It's not so easy for a man, Diana."

"I should know in a second if a man wasn't in love with me!"

"That's because you're in love. I don't think she is," he said.

"I'm in love! With whom?" asked Diana, quickly.

He stopped still, and faced her with a laugh.

"Oh, you little actress! You're in love with me, of course!" he said.

She looked at him hard for a minute. The wind off the lake had whipped her cheeks to scarlet, and she saw how his eyes shone as he laughed at her. And she knew, as she looked, that every line, every curve of his open, square face was dear to her. His voice made the world sing to her, his touch gave her the earth and its treasure. But she knew, even as she felt this, that ecstasy was a faulty guide and youth a sense-blind thing.

"David—we shall have to prove that to each

other," she said, with a gravity that left him wondering.

"I say, don't let's talk of Wargrave. I get quite enough of him."

"Very well. I'll come back to you."

"That's equally dull," he said.

"But not to me. The next question is where do you live—at home?"

"No—we're back to Wargrave again. I live in his house in Bruton Street. Now I've a question. Where do you live?"

"At Mrs. Maggs's, six-hundred-and-forty George Street."

"Maggs—what a proper name for a landlady," laughed David.

"Don't be unkind, she's a darling," said Diana, rebuking him.

"Then I'll come and live there—I'm not comfortable," he chaffed.

"You'd have to live in one room, put a shilling in the slot, do your breakfast on the gas-ring, and pay twopence for a hot bath!"

"But I'd be near you!" said David, joyfully, pressing her arm.

"David—you're incredibly young!" she laughed. "Where are you taking me? I must be back by three."

"Round the Serpentine. Isn't it beautiful?"

The trees were black skeletons, the air misty, the wind cold as it blew across the expanse of water, leaden as the clouds above it.

"Beautiful!" echoed Diana, for it was summer in her eyes.

At a quarter-to-three they parted, by Albert Gate. They agreed to meet the next day at the same place and time.

"I wish I wasn't tied up in the evenings," sighed David.

"Are you always at the theater?"

"Not always—but Wargrave's a habit of working at night. He can think better then. If only you could be free in the day, Diana."

"There's always some obstacle——" she began.

"To the course of true love!" he completed.

"Don't you think it's too soon to know that?" she asked.

"Know what?" he said, smiling down at her. The great impulse to take her in his arms again was only checked by the people passing so near to them.

"Whether we really are in love with each other?" she asked. And while in her own heart there was no doubt, she felt it was wise to challenge this thing which had come so quickly to them. Could life be as kind as this?

"What a queer little thing you are—Diana, you distrust Fate?" he asked.

"I don't know, David—sometimes I——"

"Diana, I distrust it. You're like me," he said, gravely. And then, as if dismissing their foreboding, "But we'll defy it, won't we?"

She made no answer, save to smile at him and put out her hand.

"Then to-morrow?" she said.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!" he quoted, as they parted.

II

At half-past three Sir Lionel Glent returned to Cadogan Square, and after his valet had attended to him for some time he sent word that he would be glad for Miss Delaney to come down to his study and read to him.

"I want you to pick the news out of the *Times*," he said, when she had seated herself near to him. "I'd like the sport pages first. The Hunting Notes, then the Racing and——"

He stopped, and gave his head that characteristic tilt when he wished to say something particular.

"I say, perhaps you'd rather leave the racing, so——" he said, but Diana interrupted him.

"Of course I'll read the racing. You mustn't think I'm an old prude!" laughed Diana. "It's true I've never been to a race meeting—but I've brothers!"

He laughed with her.

"You know, I'm going to corrupt you, Miss Delaney, with my low tastes. I love boxing. I get Tuppence to take me. I sit and listen to the smacks and thuds, the grunting, and slithering of feet over the canvas, and all the noises at the ringside. Tuppence gets terribly thrilled. 'There's blood now, sir!' he says to me. You see, I'm a boxing fan—I once held the Public Schools' Championship. Well, shall we begin?"

Diana had read for about half an hour when the door opened and Lady Glent entered. She did not come into the room, except to stand with the door closed behind her. Diana stopped reading and waited for her to speak.

"So you're here!" said Lady Glent, not moving
"That's very nice!"

Sir Lionel tilted his head.

"Hello, mother," he said, but Diana heard a note of anxiety in his greeting. Lady Glent did not answer for a while.

"Miss Delaney's a very pretty girl, isn't she, Leo?" she asked at length. Something in the softness of the voice made Diana's heart labor.

"Pretty darling! What a pity Lionel can't see you, darling. Be kind to Leo, and I'll be kind to you, pretty darling!" cried Lady Glent.

"Mother!"

Sir Lionel's staccato cry seemed to strike her, for she drew back against the door.

"Mother, please go to your room, you're unwell. I'll ring for Mason," said Sir Lionel.

She looked at him steadily, and then smiled, a sickening smile that made Diana's heart sink. It was true, too terribly true.

"Why should I go to my room? And I don't want my maid. I love you, Leo. Mother loves her poor Leo, doesn't she? Doesn't she?" she repeated to Diana.

"Lady Glent, let me take you to your room, you look so ill," pleaded Diana, rising and going to her.

Lady Glent smiled at her, a silly, meaningless smile.

"Pretty darling! Read to poor Leo, pretty darling. I want to hear you read. You have such lovely eyes. So has Leo, hasn't he, poor boy?"

"Miss Delaney, make mother sit down. I've rung for Mason," said Sir Lionel, quietly.
"Mother, won't you feel better in your room?"

"No, darling. I'm not drunk, am I? No, they tell lies, don't they? And they try to hide things!"

She laughed to herself, but she let Diana take her to a chair.

"Pretty darling. Let me hold your hand. I find them, darling! They hide, and I find!" she laughed. She looked around her, steadily, unseeing. "My darling Leo, my boy, Leo!"

"Yes, mother—I'm all right, mother. Now here's Mason. You must lie down, dear."

The door had opened and Mason came into the room. She looked at Sir Lionel, and then at Diana. Without a word she went and put an arm around Lady Glent.

"Now, my lady, we must be going," she said.

"I'm not going! How dare you?" cried Lady Glent, with a sudden show of dignity.

"Yes, I have something for you, my lady."

"I've heard that before. You hide it. But I find it!"

She laughed, and glared at the maid.

Sir Lionel sat still, head lifted, listening. Diana stood by his chair, paralyzed with the horror of the scene.

"No, m'lady, come along. I shan't keep it from you. And Sir Lionel is very tired," said the maid.

"You treat me like a baby. I won't be treated like a baby," cried Lady Glent. And then, in a whisper—"Where is it?"

"In your room, m'lady."

"Some you'd hidden?"

"Yes, m'lady, so come."

Lady Glent stood up, not speaking for a few moments.

"You know, I don't feel well, Mason," she said.

"No, m'lady—you're not well, but you'll feel better in your room."

"Look at that girl. Isn't she a pretty darling? Leo likes pretty darlings. Dear Leo!"

The maid was leading her out. Lady Glent turned at the door and looked again at her son and Diana.

"I will be down for tea—if I'm not too tired," she said.

"Righto, mother!" answered Sir Lionel, cheerfully.

She went out with Mason. The door closed.

There was a long silence between them. Then Diana sat down and opened the paper.

"Shall I read any more, Sir Lionel?" she asked. "There are some new discoveries in Ur of the Chaldees."

"Yes, go on, please," he said, quietly.

Diana was choking, but with a supreme effort she began reading.

At four o'clock the footman brought in a tea-tray. Diana stopped reading, the book in her hand.

"Shall I go on or——"

"No—but please have tea with me. Another cup, Hilton," said Sir Lionel.

"I've your letters ready for signing. I'll fetch them while tea comes in," said Diana.

She ran up to her room, but before returning with the letters, she looked in the glass, half expecting to see herself years older. That scene in the study had been terrible.

Half-way through tea Sir Lionel suddenly changed the topic they were discussing.

"Miss Delaney, I must speak about what's happened. You saw my mother?" he asked.

"Yes," said Diana, quietly.

"You saw what was wrong with her?"

"Yes, Sir Lionel—I saw she was very—unwell," added Diana, finding herself unable to pronounce the word in her mind.

"Drunk, Miss Delaney. We can be frank with each other. I must beg your pardon for her—I'm sorry you should have to go through this."

"Oh, Sir Lionel, please don't mention it. It was you I thought of," cried Diana.

"Me?" he asked. "Oh, I don't matter, Miss Delaney. It's my poor mother that matters. That is all that matters," he added, sadly.

"It is terrible for you both," said Diana. She saw his hands working nervously over the arms of his leather chair, extraordinary hands, that seemed endowed with a special intelligence as if in compensation for his darkness.

"What can I do, Miss Delaney? They would have me send her away, where she'd be under restraint. But I could not tell how they would treat her—and she is my mother. She is like this because of me."

"Because of you?" queried Diana.

"Yes. I think mothers had the worst of the war, Miss Delaney. They had to wait, and hope, while we were doing things, and not feeling so much the danger, although it was bloody enough. I was a boy, and the excitement kept me up. My mother wasn't like this then. She began after I was blinded

—nerves, you know—and it's grown on her. My poor mother! I can't send her away. Mason's wonderful with her, but sometimes she eludes everybody. Then this happens."

"If I can help, Sir Lionel," suggested Diana.

"Thank you—this had to be known sooner or later. All her friends know, of course, and those who are worth calling friends stand by her. Don't you think I'm right not to let her go away?"

He seemed anxious for her assurance, as if doubtful in his mind.

"You are quite right, Sir Lionel. I'm sure of it. If there's anything that could help her it's your love," said Diana, fervently.

He was silent a moment, one hand playing with Thingummy's head as the dog sat by his chair.

"Yes, I like to think that," he said, "although I know they seldom get better from this kind of failing."

He picked two lumps of sugar out of the bowl.

"Have you seen Thingummy and Jingummy die for their country? Now, gentlemen!" he cried.

Thingummy and Jingummy stood up, tails wagging, eyes on the sugar. At the word they began their performance of rolling, groaning and lying dead.

CHAPTER IX

I

A FORTNIGHT passed, and for Diana to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow slipped by, with her work at Cadogan Square and meetings with David at their rendezvous in the Park. And then, one day, Diana, walking up Grosvenor Place, made a discovery. There, on a little island, amid the vortex of traffic, stood David, the bronze counterpart of Diana in the Park. She looked with a thrill at its adolescent beauty, the young David, sturdy-thighed, supple-shouldered, leaning on his sword, as he looked down Grosvenor Place. The leafless branches of a tree swayed over his young curled head, and the strong light of an arc lamp lit his pleasant face on this wintry evening. She read the words at the base of the memorial to the Machine Gun Corps, "Saul hath slain his thousands but David his tens of thousands." And as she looked at it, a sculptor's vision of superb young manhood, she felt, as David with the statue of Diana, that here was something enduring, the symbol of that other David she was finding so necessary in her life.

Diana told him of this statue, which he had scarcely heeded, and they visited it together.

"It's rather orninous," he said, when he had examined it, admiringly, with her.

"Why?"

"Well—just look at him. He's turned his back

on Diana!" It was true. The back was towards Hyde Park. They laughed over it together, and then read the names on the wreaths of tribute at its base.

They knew Hyde Park well now. In three whole afternoons they had spent together he had shown her other parts of London, further afield, Richmond, Hampton Court and Kew. They had had delightful little luncheons and teas and dinners together on the days when they contrived to be free. He had a gift for finding quaint, hidden little places in parts that London had left to the work of decay, where other young lovers sat long over the teacups, reluctant to leave the warmth and intimacy.

Then one day a shadow fell. Wargrave was going to New York for the production of one of his plays, and David had to go with him.

"Will it be for long?" asked Diana, trying to hide her dismay.

"Only a month, Diana. We shall be back early in the New Year. It won't seem long, especially as you'll be home for Christmas."

"Home?" echoed Diana. "I can't go there now!"

He looked at her fondly, reading the sadness in her face.

"I'm sorry, Diana—I forgot that. You can go somewhere?"

"Oh, yes. I'm going to Alice's, my sister. She has written already. And I shall see mother, of course, and the others," she said.

"No one'll be thinking of me, all alone in a foreign land!" he cried, with mock misery. "Listen, Diana,

I've a plan for our last day together—our last whole day together!"

"The whole day!" cried Diana. "Where?"

"Let's make it next Saturday—you can get the morning off. I'm going to borrow Wargrave's car and take you down to Tring. He has a cottage there, where he writes, and he'll lend it me for the day. We can have lunch and supper there, you'll love it. It's on a hill, with thick woods and a wonderful view."

"If I can get the morning off——" began Diana, but he interrupted her in his impulsive boyish way.

"My dear Diana, there's no 'if' about it. You're coming even if I have to snatch you from the bold bad baronet! So that's that!"

Diana consented to getting a day free, but she felt unhappy at the prospect of his departure. He was really all she had in London. There were Mrs. Maggs, Cherry, Sir Lionel—but her relations were not like those with David, who listened to all her little troubles and was so sympathetic.

"Oh, David, I shall miss you," she said, as they sat in a tea-room overlooking Chelsea Embankment and the gray Thames.

"Darling," he said, his hand finding hers under the table. "But you managed to live without me once!"

"I don't think I did live. I couldn't go back to that life—and its loneliness."

He looked at her sharply, as if something singular had occurred to him. "Diana, you don't mean to say I'm the first lover you've had?" he asked.

The question seemed to startle her.

"The first—of course you are, David, you don't

imagine I'm that sort of person!" she said, fervently, looking at him with wide eyes.

He saw she was terribly serious, and in a spirit of sheer folly, to enjoy her astonishment, he said—

"Oh, Diana—all girls have had several affairs at your age! As for men, well——"

He checked himself, aware that his banter was not understood, for there was dismay in her face as she looked at him.

"David, there's not been any one else whom you've—loved?"

He laughed gently at her, and covered her thin white hand with his as it lay on the table. They were alone in the old-fashioned room now, the other couple having gone. Outside a tug, towing a long stream of barges, hooted dismally, and the lights on the Battersea bridge hung like yellow moons in the purple evening.

"Do you know what that reminds me of?" he said, looking out of the window—"Whistler's *Nocturne*."

But she had no mind for the scene outside. Something in David's light manner had filled her with alarm.

"David—have there been others—before me, I mean others you cared as much for?" she asked.

His eyes gazed steadily into hers, and he regretted having opened a subject that seemed to disconcert her so.

"My dear," he said, quietly, "that's a question no woman should ask a man. But as you've asked it, I'll be honest with you. Do you think it's possible for a man to be twenty-seven without having had a number of women in his life? Diana dear, I'm no

better nor worse, I hope, than many others. I've done things I regret—and I've made mistakes. Is it necessary for me to say I love you more than any one I've ever loved in my life?"

He kept her hand as he spoke, his eyes unflinchingly on her face, and she felt reassured by his honesty.

"Forgive me, David—I'm a little fool," she said, quietly.

"You're a little angel," he murmured, leaning over towards her until he could almost touch her lips. "And it makes me afraid!"

"Why?"

"Because angels are difficult persons to get on with!"

"Do you think I'm difficult, then?"

"I don't know, Diana. Sometimes you make me afraid. You're so unsophisticated that I feel ashamed."

"Unsophisticated—that's a hateful word—it's a polite way of calling me a little fool—isn't it?" she said quickly, but without resentment.

"That's the last thing I could think you. I say, why are we talking like this? It's all very silly and useless. We're here together, that's all that matters," he said, forcing a note of gaiety into his voice.

"I don't regret this talk, David. Honesty hurts no one. I can forgive anything but deceit—I'm so glad you were frank. You see, I'm quite sensible—if unsophisticated," she added with a smile.

The waitress, bringing tea, interrupted the conversation. Diana could not fail to notice that David was a little perturbed. It had been stupid of her

not to have guessed there must have been others in his life before her. He was six years older, living in London and a man of the world. She could see now that his transparent honesty had caused him to confess, and she felt thankful he had given her his confidence. The ties between them were growing stronger daily, for they had now begun to explore each other's minds, following the rapture of their meetings.

II

Diana could not make up her mind whether to tell Sir Lionel she knew Mr. Wargrave's secretary. One afternoon, when he came back from lunch with a friend at a club, he said—

"By the way—I met Arthur Wargrave—the fellow who wrote *The Right Idea*. I always wanted to meet him, and he was lunching at the Cavendish to-day."

"What is he like, Sir Lionel?" asked Diana.

"Well, as I sensed him—young, with a rich voice, and, of course, a splendid talker. I asked him to come and see me one day, and he promised he would. You'll be able to tell me what he's like when he comes, for you'll see him."

"I can tell you just a little now," confessed Diana, feeling she might speak of David at last.

"Oh—you've seen him?"

"No—but my friend's his secretary," she said. "I know a little about him."

"Really? Does she like working with him? It's such a test, isn't it? I wonder what you'd say if you were asked that about me!" he laughed.

"I should say you had the sweetest, most courageous disposition I'd ever known," replied Diana, warmly, forgetting reserve in her quick admiration of him.

"Oh, I say! That's jolly of you, Miss Delaney. Jove, I must live up to that!" he cried.

Diana felt a little confused by her sudden revelation of her regard for him.

"My friend's a gentleman—not a lady," said Diana. "He tells me Mr. Wargrave's going to America next week, to put on one of his plays there. Mr. Hameldon asked me yesterday——"

"Hameldon?"

"Yes—Mr. David Hameldon—his secretary. He asked me whether I would like to see Mr. Wargrave's country place, at Tring, where he writes."

"Oh, you must go!" said Sir Lionel at once.

"I'd like to, if you and Lady Glent could spare me on Saturday. He wants to motor me down in the morning," explained Diana.

"Certainly, you go, Miss Delaney. And if you meet Wargrave, tell him you're a great help to the old log he met at the Cavendish!"

"Thank you. I've your letters here—will you sign them now?"

"Righto!" said Sir Lionel, pulling out a fountain-pen.

He wrote his name boldly across the paper.

"You'll tell me if ever I begin to get on the slant, won't you, Miss Delaney?" he asked.

"You write wonderfully level, Sir Lionel," replied Diana.

He sat silent for a few moments, his pen still in his hand.

"Will you give me my check-book? Please write first what I dictate."

Diana found his book and opened it, writing the date on a blank check.

"Yes, Sir Lionel?" she asked.

"Make it out to Miss Diana Delaney, for ten pounds ten shillings," he said.

Diana's hand did not move. She looked up at him.

"Oh, Sir Lionel—I couldn't. Really, I couldn't, thank you!" she cried.

"Miss Delaney, are you my secretary? This is the first thing you have refused to do for me!" he said, with mock severity.

"But, Sir Lionel, I really can't accept anything from you!"

"If I wasn't a poor blind devil who can't see what he's buying, I should go into Bond Street and get you a Christmas Box, without you knowing. That you'd have to accept! But because I don't want to give you something you don't want, I'm asking you to write me a check. Miss Delaney, this is gross insubordination to your superior officer. I am waiting!" he cried.

"Oh, Sir Lionel!" faltered Diana.

"I'm beginning to know that name!" he laughed.

"Now, come along."

Diana made out the check, and he signed it.

III

When Diana arrived back at George Street that same evening she found an elegant young man at the telephone in the hall. It was Mr. Jack Moulton.

the occupant of the room under hers. As he never came home until after midnight, and never rose before ten, Diana had only seen him twice. With his socks she had had many meetings as they lay in Mrs. Maggs's lap. "'Is toes must be like tooth-picks, 'e makes 'oles in 'em so quick!" declared the old lady, on one occasion. Mr. Moulton, wholly unconscious of the exposure he suffered below stairs, looked at Diana as she came in.

"Excuse me, you're Miss Delaney, aren't you?" he asked. "Mrs. Maggs has been taken ill, I've just telephoned for the doctor. She's on the couch downstairs. I wonder whether you'd go down to her awhile?"

"Why, certainly—what's the matter?"

"It's her heart, I believe. She was taken ill while climbing the stairs. This is the second time. I've warned her about climbing all those stairs, the poor old thing shouldn't do it."

Diana went downstairs, and found her landlady on the couch.

"Now, my dear—don't get excited," said Mrs. Maggs, as Diana went to her. "It's only me 'eart. It's been wobbly for years, and I know just 'ow to manage it. There's some sal volatile in that cupboard, dearie. Just put a teaspoonful in a wine glass, with a little water."

"Mr. Moulton's telephoned for the doctor," said Diana, going to the cupboard. She was faced with an array of medicine bottles.

"Ay, the silly boy. He would do it, although I told 'im not to. What's the good of a doctor for a 'eart like mine? If I've got to go, you don't think it would let me wait for 'im! But it's only 'is kind-

ness. I shall be all right in a few minutes. That sal volatile does wonders."

"You mustn't talk, Mrs. Maggs," said Diana, reprovingly.

The old lady laughed and smoothed out her dress.

"Eh, you can't stop me doing that after all these years, dearie!" she answered.

"You're a naughty old lady," laughed Diana, giving her the medicine.

Mrs. Maggs drank it, sighed, said "Heh!" philosophically and sighed again.

"I think it was the bit of excitement this mornin', dearie," she said.

"Excitement? What excited you?"

"I'm always excited when I get a letter from Jim, bless 'im. It's silly, I know, seeing as 'ow I've 'ad 'em coming for years. But mothers are daft old things, aren't they? I 'ope you write reg'ly to yours, Miss Delaney?"

"I write every week, Mrs. Maggs. I think I should be excited if I'd a good-looking son like yours writing to me."

"Ay, well, p'r'aps you will one day, an let's 'ope 'e doesn't break your 'eart for you. There's no knowin' 'ow they turn out! Jim writes wonderful letters, long and newsy—that's 'ow I like 'em."

The bell rang.

"That's the doctor, dearie, will you let 'im in? He's been quick; but it doesn't take 'em long when there's ten shillings at the end of it!" observed Mrs. Maggs, shrewdly. "But 'e's a nice enough man."

The doctor left a few minutes afterwards. The

old lady had instructions to keep quiet for a few days, and not to go upstairs.

"I wonder how 'e thinks we get our work done?" asked Mrs. Maggs.

"But you must keep quiet!" warned Diana. "We'll manage."

"I'll send for my sister-in-law, Mrs. Newton, if I'm not better in the mornin'," observed Mrs. Maggs, and added, determinedly, "An' I shall be!"

There was a knock on the door. Mr. Moulton came in.

"Well, Mrs. Maggs—what does he say to you?" he asked, cheerfully.

"Oh, the usual, Mr. Moulton. I'm to retire from business!" Mrs. Maggs gave a scornful laugh and smoothed out her apron with an action grown familiar to all in the house.

"We'll keep you quiet. I'll cook my own breakfast and yours in the morning. You can stay in bed, and I'll get Miss Delaney to bring it up to you," said Mr. Moulton, resting a slim hand on a slim waist. Diana found herself wondering if he had ever cracked an egg over a frying-pan in his life. Then, noticing his pointed suede shoes, obviously the cause of the sock trouble, she suppressed a smile.

"You, Mr. Moulton! I've never 'eard of such a thing!" cried Mrs. Maggs.

"I believe in bein' early," he mimicked.

"Now, Mr. Moulton, be'ave yourself!" said the old lady.

"Ditto, Mrs. Maggs! You stay in bed and see what happens. We can manage, can't we, Miss Delaney? I'm quite domesticated. I once nearly won the Queen's Prize for Needlework. I was beaten

by the leading man in Whalley's Midnight Follies."

"I should say leading midnight follies is just where you'd win, Mr. Moulton," retorted Mrs. Maggs, gamely.

"Now, we mustn't excite you! We shall just be firm with you. Listen!" said Mr. Moulton, sitting on the table and swinging a long limb—"The young ladies will be given their hot water at eight o'clock, as usual. I shall tap on their doors and say 'Beginners, please!' like a proper call-boy. Then——"

"Oh, you are a tease, you are, Mr. Moulton," exclaimed the patient.

"Then, Mrs. Maggs, I shall descend, make you a cup of tea, and proceed to fry my bacon and eggs, having taken in the milk and put out the cat."

"That won't work," declared the old lady. "Did you ever 'ear of the cat goin' out when the milk came in? It's unnatural! No, Mr. Moulton, I can't let you do this. I'll be up."

"Mrs. Maggs," said the young man, adjusting his tie, "you'll do nothing of the kind. Unless I receive from you a solemn promise that you'll stay in bed until I've made the fire and got breakfast, I shall leave this house to-night forever!"

"We'll make all the beds, so there's no need for you to go upstairs," said Diana.

"You see, you are powerless in our hands!" declared Mr. Moulton. "Miss Delaney and I are running the house. When Miss Jerningham comes in, she'll see you to bed, with instructions that you don't move until she's seen you again in the morning. Reckless young people must be severely dealt with."

"You are a tease, Mr. Moulton!" cried Mrs.

Maggs. "Well, I'll 'umor you both, until to-morrow."

"Good—now I'm off to the theater with an easy mind!" said the young man, slipping off the table. "Good night, Miss Delaney. Good night, Mrs. Maggs."

He left the room, and Diana sat with the old lady until Miss Jerningham, home every evening at eight, came in, when she handed over the patient. Upstairs, Diana tapped on Cherry Carmen's door, for a light was burning.

"Come in! Hello, Diana," cried Cherry. "My dear, can't you smell what I'm doing!"

"Fish and chips," answered Diana, without any doubt.

"Di—you don't know what a terrible vice I have! There's nothing excites me more at night than to walk behind a person eating chip potatoes, especially if they've put vinegar on them! I simply can't resist the smell! I'm warming up some fish and chips now—I've been at the studio all day and I'm ready to drop. Do have some."

Diana sat down. Cherry's fish and chip suppers had become an institution.

"Well, my dear," said Cherry, as she lifted the frying-pan off the gas-ring and put its contents on two plates taken out of her corner cupboard, "I'm through!"

"Through, Cherry—what do you mean? You've not quarreled at the studio?"

"No more than usual. No, Diana, I mean I'm finished," explained Cherry. "I've had my eye cut open, I've been pulled out of the river, doped, seduced, locked up in an attic that took fire, rescued

by a handsome policeman who believed I was virtuous, married me, and left me smiling in the kitchen of a maisonette in Balham. I came in again, on reel two, as Lady Augusta Gayborough, and I died of drink in reel three, with awful throes and a vision of my boy in jail, where I'd sent him. To-night they've paid me off, and I join the unemployed again. But I've ten pounds to defy the world with!"

"Cherry, do you know what I've been thinking? I'm going to ask David to speak to Mr. Wargrave, to ask him to give you a part," said Diana, excited with her sudden inspiration.

"No, you mustn't do that, Di," said Cherry at once.

"Why not? I'm sure he would."

"Well, in the first place, it isn't fair, because a kind young man loves you, to test him with procuring jobs for waifs and strays. Secondly, in my profession, it's simply dangerous to recommend anybody. We all think we're Sarah Bernhardts, and if I were, your David couldn't make anybody believe it by saying so. Wargrave, if he bothers at all about it, has a dozen favorites standing in a queue and——"

"What do you mean by 'favorites'?" asked Diana, suspiciously.

"Anything, my dear, from obliging ladies with no gifts to gifted ladies with no obligations."

"Cherry, you're frightfully scathing—don't you believe in anybody?"

Cherry Carmen impaled a chip on a fork and held it in front of her pretty mouth. She gave her head

a shake, sending her lovely hair fluffing out, which made her look like shock-headed-Peter.

"Not until I'm compelled, my dear. It's so nice to make a mistake then."

"But you're so cheerful, Cherry. I couldn't go on if I thought like that!" cried Diana.

"Darling, I treat life as a joke because I daren't realize it's a tragedy. You'll go on trusting to the end of your days; you're built that way."

"But you'll let me speak to David?"

"I'd rather you didn't. It's not fair to him. He's probably burnt his fingers that way already, my dear."

Cherry's light-hearted words seemed to have an extraordinary effect on Diana, for she sat silent for a long time, replying to her friend's chatter with monosyllables. "He's probably burnt his fingers that way already!" Was David alluding to something like that when he admitted having had affairs in the past? There were girls who were willing to give much for advancement. Yet, despite his words, she simply could not imagine him to be that kind of man. There was something so boyish, so spontaneous about him still, a freshness in his love-making that could not be feigned.

"A penny for them, Di," called Cherry, seeing the far-away expression of her eyes. "What's the latest bulletin on David?"

"Nothing, dear—I do wish he wasn't going away. I feel something will happen."

"I know that feeling. If you can't keep your eye on them it's impossible to believe something won't happen."

"Cherry! It isn't that at all. I know David through and through."

Cherry Carmen sat upright, and pointed at her friend with a fork, accusingly.

"Now, Diana, none of that nonsense! There's not a woman in the world knows a man through and through, thank God. If we did we should have no further interest in them. You've known David less than two months. My dear, it's incredible how many tight corners a man can get in and out of in twelve months."

"David's not like that," said Diana, slightly perturbed.

"Our David never is, but the other David has slain his tens of thousands!"

"Oh, Cherry!—how extraordinary of you to say that! That's what's on David's statue."

"Whose?" asked Cherry, looking wide-eyed at Diana, who sometimes made her feel she was shooting a sitting bird.

"I've found a lovely statue called 'David' in Grosvenor Place. I could gaze at it all day. When David's away I shall go there and feel that I've still got him."

"My heavens!" exclaimed Cherry. "Has he set you so much on fire that you can keep warm with marble!"

"It isn't marble—it's bronze," replied Diana, a little annoyed by this levity.

"Marble or bronze, it's cold comfort, my dear. I haven't seen the statue yet that can make this old heart jump. A bird in the arms is worth ten on a pedestal."

Diana had to laugh at Cherry's disdain.

"I don't believe you've ever been in love," accused Diana.

"Oh, yes, I have—once, my dear. It was a bad measles, too, and made me all rash. I fell for a pink young thing, with black eyes and a Harrow tie. I used to stand in the wings and get frightful colds, watching him make love—as Russians are supposed to—all hair and adjectives. That attack lasted two months, and what with wet pillows and loss of appetite, I nearly faded out. He had eyes, my dear, that made you feel like a cathedral choir. Then, one day, I found he'd been divorced and was being kept by a Spanish dancer. You could have swept me up with a crumb-brush. I'm sorry your David's anything to do with the stage. We're apt to 'play off' without knowing it."

"He isn't *on* the stage," emphasized Diana.

"My dear, you're safer *on* than around, that's my experience. Still, don't let me frighten you. He's probably a nice home-keeping young man."

There was a tap on the door. It was Miss Jerningham.

"I've put her to bed," she said. "She ought to stay there a few days. I wouldn't give ninepence for a life hanging on a heart like hers."

"Poor old thing," commented Cherry, collecting plates for washing. "She's good-hearted in every other respect. If she passes out I shall put up a plaque, 'Here lived a Noble Landlady.'"

CHAPTER X

I

THE boat train, with the *Mauretania's* passengers from Southampton, was ten minutes late in arriving at Waterloo station. Audrey Gloucester stared gloomily out of the carriage window as the train ran through the chimney-pot wilderness of London's suburbs. The wintry afternoon was darkening, gray and misty. Across the world of roofs, upper stories, miserable bedroom windows and smoke-grimed houses, telegraph wires and factory signs, London's streets cut deeply, like greasy canals bordered with lamps. It was a depressing return, thought Audrey Gloucester, after the clean sparkle of New York, with its Babylonian towers, its pyramidal masonry, its gothic-steel temples to industry. She turned from the window as her father spoke to her. Her parents might have been returning to the Garden of Eden instead of the city of fog. As for Ronald, her father's secretary, his patriotic cheerfulness had begun in the Channel at breakfast, despite the fog-horn's wail.

"The thing I'm most looking forward to to-morrow," said Sir John Gloucester, boyishly, despite the white hair on his temples and the absence of all hair on his crown, "is a cut from the joint at Simpson's! Those Americans are marvelous hosts, but they don't know what roast beef is!"

"Father, don't be so childish. Cooking, like re-

ligion, is largely a matter of geography," said Audrey.

"Audrey dear," cried her mother, "I do wish you wouldn't speak so lightly of religion. I don't even like your laughing at those poor Holy Rollers you saw in Texas. After all, they mean well!"

"Mother, it's the people who mean well who are the worst tyrants!" replied Audrey, with a little show of temper.

"I think Audrey's protest," said Mr. Ronald Caine, from his corner seat, "springs neither from beef nor religion. It's righteous indignation with Arthur for not coming down to see our boat in."

He knew, the moment he had spoken, by the look in Audrey's eyes, that he was right. Being an ambitious young man he had cultivated the analysis of human motives. After four months close study of his employer's daughter, he had an accurate intuition of her thought.

"He might have come down, certainly," said Audrey Gloucester. "It's a short enough journey. He's probably forgotten we're returning!"

"My dear, how can you say such a thing about Arthur," cried Lady Gloucester. "I wonder what my mother would have thought if I'd talked of my fiancé in the way you do."

Sir John laughed at them, winking his kindly eyes.

"I'd much rather they quarreled now than afterwards. He'll be at the station. He's probably heavily over-worked just now. Dear me, we're almost ten minutes late! I thought we never should get through the Customs. It gets worse every year."

Young Caine stood up and began to collect their packages. He, too, was not feeling particularly

happy. They had had four months together without restraint. He had never doubted that he liked Sir John's daughter sufficiently to marry her. She was attractive enough, without being the sole heir to his wealth. With that wealth she might one day be a peeress or a Prime Minister's wife, in the keeping of a man who knew how to use it. It was a wicked waste for her to marry Arthur Wargrave. He had adroitly suggested this for the last four months, and she seemed to be growing conscious of the truth at last.

"I suppose Banks will be waiting with the car?" inquired Audrey.

"I sent a telegram at Southampton to make sure," answered Caine.

"Ah—here we are!" cried Sir John, as they drew in alongside the platform. "Home! Sweet Home!"

As he said this he could not help seeing that the expression on his daughter's face was anything but sweet. Really, young lovers nowadays looked like wormwood and kissed like gall!

II

Arthur Wargrave, waiting for the Boat Express to come in, was not happy about the ordeal before him. There was no flinching the fact, it had become an ordeal. In those minutes of waiting he had time to examine his feelings and was shocked to discover that he had come there to act a rôle—the rôle of the enthusiastic lover welcoming home his fiancée, after four long months of absence. He was shocked, because he had not it in him to be the happy hypocrite. He was a young man, the normal product of

public school and university, who clung to convention because he felt that convention was sound. He loathed anything Bohemian, like those untidy, happy-go-lucky creatures his work brought him in contact with.

Had he realized it, he was innately suspicious of any one with less than a thousand a year or without the right to wear a college tie. He stiffened when they played "God Save the King," entirely removed his hat whenever he passed the Cenotaph, religiously attended the Oxford and Cambridge match at Lords in July and at Twickenham in December. There was a certain shop where a gentleman bought his hat, another where he bought his shirts, another where he bought his umbrella. Not to know and patronize these places was as derogatory as not knowing the bay window of White's in St. James's Street, or the particular regiment that was called the Blues.

A prig? By no means. An honorable, healthy young Englishman who in appearance and conduct would make any father proud, any mother adoring. His kind had died by the thousand at Agincourt, Malplaquet, Badajoz, Waterloo and Ypres, leading the rough lads who loved them. Their faith was in gilt-edge securities, untrustful of democracy, conscious of British birth—to be born anything else was to be negligible. Such men are the sound substance of which wars and heroes are made by schemers and blundering Governments.

In one respect Arthur Wargrave escaped normality. Since a boy at Stowe he had been noticeably endowed with wit. It had blossomed now in two comedies running in London. His first success,

at twenty-three, had surprised no one who knew him, for he had talked himself into Carlton House Terrace while still at Oxford. Few could resist his combination of Attic wit and grace.

Sir John Gloucester, his uncle and guardian since the orphaned lad of fourteen had been sent home from India, had regarded him as a son. It had been, for him, a pleasurable experience to see this bright lad slowly change into a prospective son-in-law. Arthur and Audrey were a fine pair to behold. They had grown up together, with every means of attaining a sound appreciation of each other's qualities.

Arthur Wargrave, pacing the cold platform, was now faced with the perturbing fact of that growing-up-together. They had imperceptibly slipped into an engagement. Audrey was pretty, sensible and a splendid companion. Those qualities constituted a good wife. She, proud of his appearance and his success, knew he was reliable and envied. The absence of passion in their attachment had never occurred to either of them. Passion was a thing fusing strangers, after which it often left them coldly welded.

The events of the last four months, combined with the lesson that Audrey's absence in America had not awakened in him any sense of loss or longing for her return, brought him to face the undeniable truth. Not only did he know he did not love her, he knew that marriage with her was doomed to failure.

But how should he inform her of his conviction? As he saw the train draw in, he knew he had found no answer to that question. For the time being he must keep up that pretense. Sooner or later she must realize the truth, or be told it.

"Well, my boy!" exclaimed Sir John, shaking him warmly by the hand. "It's good to see you!"

Arthur Wargrave kissed his aunt, and then turned to Audrey. She was as lovely as always, very chic in her gray traveling costume.

"Audrey," said Wargrave, simply. Taking her in his arms, he kissed her. She returned the salute, placing an arm around his neck.

"We expected you at Southampton, Arthur," she said, her clear eyes looking at him critically. He was good to look at, so well-groomed and athletic.

"I'm sorry, Audrey. I had hoped to come, but I'd some interviews at the last moment, I simply couldn't escape them."

She slipped from his arms, and he turned to Caine, who had superintended the transference of their light luggage.

"Hello, Ronnie—quite fit?" he asked.

"Quite, thanks, Arthur," replied Caine. "I hear you've had another success with *The Right Idea*."

"It's running well," said Wargrave. They were all in the car now. He thought this was the best moment to break his news. The sooner they knew, the better for his comfort.

"I wish you hadn't been coming back before Christmas," he said.

"Why?" asked Sir John, as they all looked at him in surprise.

"Because, as it happens, I shall be in New York. I've to leave next week for the production of my play," he explained.

"Oh, Arthur—that's too bad!" said Lady Gloucester. "We'd looked forward to a real Christ-

mas—I was going to give a few dances for you both."

"I'm very sorry, aunt—I simply must go. Audrey, I'd ask you to come over with me, but I know you're tired of traveling," he said, turning to her. Once again he fell under the spell of her appearance. He should be the happiest fellow in the world with the possibility of having a wife like Audrey.

"I expect you can't help it, Arthur," she said. "After four months' separation, I don't suppose I shall notice another month or two."

Sir John laughed, and turned to his wife.

"It seems to me, my dear, that engagements these days imply a necessity to see as little of one another as possible. It wouldn't have satisfied us—but I suppose we don't move with the times. When are you actually sailing, Arthur?"

"On the tenth."

"Why, that's just a week!" said Audrey Gloucester.

"I'm sorry. You see, I didn't think you'd be home for Christmas, and, of course, I'm in their hands about the date of production," he explained.

Audrey slipped her arm through his. Now she was with him again his old charm began to thaw her out of the icy reserve she had been maintaining.

"Never mind, Arthur, you'll be back soon?" she asked.

"Immediately I can—the end of January at the latest," he said.

Their arrival at Onslow Gardens prevented further conversation. On the whole, his impending departure had been well received. Audrey would have been quite justified in charging him with de-

section. Candidly, that was what it was. The American engagement was conveniently inconvenient. He felt he could not keep up his pretense much longer. Was it desire made him begin to think that Audrey herself would not be greatly troubled by the breaking of their engagement? He knew Caine would not be slow to step in at the first opportunity, but for Caine she had a scarcely veiled contempt. He was so obviously an *arrivist*.

Wargrave stayed to dinner, and afterwards he had a little time alone with Audrey in the library.

"Well, and what is your verdict on America?" he asked her.

She threaded a rope of pearls around her slim fingers—his present on their engagement last June.

"Geographical, political or human?" she laughed.

"Whichever interested you most—my dear."

"I had a very good time," she said, briefly.

"That tells me very little!"

She looked at him frankly, a little surprised by his serious tone.

"Have I to confess everything?" she asked, playfully.

"Not unless you wish, Audrey. But you're such a bad actress, I should guess everything without confession."

"Well—I flirted outrageously. Now scold me!" she said.

"I can't, old thing—I'm just as guilty," he answered lightly.

She laughed gayly at him then, and the next moment her alluring face so enticingly near to his, he kissed her.

"What a couple of liars we are!" she said, as he

held her to him. "We couldn't be hypocrites if we tried till Doomsday. Do you know, we'd be tremendous lovers if it weren't for one thing!"

"What's that?" he asked, indifferently, only conscious now of the pleasure of her face and hair touching his.

"We know everything about one another. It's always a mistake to grow up together," she explained.

He made no answer, but just held her against him. He felt he was a coward now, with his trip to America. He was only running away from a fact that must soon be faced. If he could be sure he would not hurt her. He was in the mood when he agreed with the philosopher who said "Better not be born!"

III

Wargrave arrived back at his rooms in Bruton Street soon after eleven, and as he went upstairs to his study he heard the typewriter clicking in Hameldon's room. He went in.

"You're working late, David. I thought you were dining out to-night?"

His secretary stopped typing and turned in his chair.

"No—I canceled the party. I'm only just going to pull through before we sail. By the way, I've got those berths on the promenade deck."

"Good!" smiled Wargrave.

"And about Miss Cherry Carmen—Jackman says she's quite a clever youngster, and she might understudy the lead in the Number One Company. It

begins the tour at Dover on January 2nd—would that be all right?"

"Yes, tell Jackman to offer her that. Now what about a whisky and soda in my den? You've done quite enough to-day."

"Righto! I'll be up as soon as I'm through this letter," replied Hameldon.

Wargrave went into the room where he worked and lived. He had simple tastes, a chair, a writing-pad and a fountain-pen were the real necessities of his career. He had taken his flat of eight rooms two years ago, when he felt the need of more freedom than he had in the Gloucester household, where he had lived since a boy. He had fitted up his rooms with almost spartan severity. One room was David's office, another his bedroom. Wargrave's own sitting-room and bedroom, with the dining-room, servant's bedroom, bathroom and kitchen comprised his establishment. Last year his income had been twenty thousand pounds, his expenditure two. With almost a shock he realized he was well on the way to being a wealthy man. His first comedy, *Dot and Carry One*, was still running; now *The Right Idea* was going strong. His one luxury was his Hispano-Suiza car. The cottage at Tring was really a business necessity, for he did most of his work down there.

Wargrave helped himself to a drink, and while waiting for David Hameldon he began to think about his friend. They had gone down from Oxford together, and when success had come, being in need of a secretary, he had offered the position to David, then waiting for briefs and trying to live on two hundred a year in chambers in Mitre Court.

He was now paying him four hundred a year, happily conscious that he was quite worth six. A few days ago David, for the first time in his life, had wondered how much a young married couple could live on. This, in conjunction with a mysterious reserve on David's part these last few weeks, made Wargrave ponder.

He would be sorry to lose his friend. They had lived happily together for two years now, and whenever David was away he had found the flat unbearably lonely. The break was inevitable, of course, but somehow he had always thought he would be the first to make it.

As Wargrave sat thinking, the door opened, revealing David, who went to the table and mixed himself a drink. Then he took out a pipe, filled it and threw himself down in a big chair. Wargrave watched him silently for a few minutes. There was something worrying his friend.

"You look tired, old man," he said. "Can't you give yourself a rest?"

"Yes, thanks—I'll be doing nothing on Saturday. I've gone through all the stuff back from the typist's."

There was silence again. Wargrave looked through the evening paper.

"How's Audrey?" asked David. "Has she brought back an American accent?"

"I haven't detected one. She seems glad to be home again. Sir John had a very successful trip," answered Wargrave.

There was another long silence.

"David!" said Wargrave, unable to keep quiet any longer.

"Yes?"

"What's troubling you these days—there's something, isn't there? You haven't been making as much noise as usual. I don't believe you've sung in the bathroom for a month!"

David puffed away a few moments.

"Getting old," he said, laconically, watching Wargrave's face intently.

"That reminds me," said Wargrave.

"Of what?"

"You've been with me two years and I've been miserably under-paying you. I believe it's a habit for friends and relations to be underpaid."

"I've not been aware of it, Arthur."

"I have. Next month we'll start at six hundred a year."

David took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Arthur, put down your paper, I want to have a look at you!"

Wargrave laughed and flung his paper away.

"I believe you're trying to be kind to me because I'm worried—isn't that it?" asked David.

"Not at all, old man. I surmised you were worried, but I know you're underpaid. I've no reason for economizing on you—I find I'm getting rich. Do you know I'm rather enjoying this!"

"What?"

"The somewhat singular situation of one man, at his own cost, having to persuade another he's under-paying him. I'll work that in a play one day—it would make a good scene."

"I can add to the situation, then," said David with a smile. "By continuing to protest that I'm not worth more."

"Very well—it'll end as all scenes end—with a curtain. I'm off to bed and I'm too tired for further argument."

Wargrave got up, shook the cigarette ash off his trousers and glanced at the clock. It was eleven-thirty. He corrected his wrist-watch, hoping meanwhile that David might unburden himself a little. But there was no word from David, who sat quietly smoking.

Finally Wargrave said "Good night" and left the room. He had always felt a little hurt by his friend's reticence. Secretiveness in a secretary was not a bad quality, but, dash it all, old David carried it to tantalizing lengths. Whatever was it this time—a girl? He could never remember a trouble of David's that was not clad in a skirt. He had himself wished to tell him something, but David was too occupied with his own trouble, whatever it was, to be receptive to another's. And perhaps it didn't matter very much.

CHAPTER XI

DIANA, like Mrs. Maggs, believed in being early. It was to the credit of the amazing Mr. Moulton that not one of them had been permitted to oversleep. Miss Penn-Porter, who never found it possible to be alert before noon, declared he was a nuisance, with his peremptory tapping on the door. Mrs. Maggs, having had three days in bed, in which to find the house went on as usual, remarked that she could see no reason why she should ever get up again. It required the combined efforts, however, of the doctor, her sister-in-law and Diana to prevail upon her to take even those three days in bed.

For some strange reason, or none at all, the old lady became obsessed by her saucepans. Saucepans that had had milk boiled in them became sour if not well scoured. It was in vain that Diana and the sister-in-law, Mrs. Newton, a stout old thing, very much in the way, physically and domestically, carried the saucepans to Mrs. Maggs, since Mrs. Maggs could not go to the saucepans, to show her that all was well.

"You mustn't think me rude, dearie, you're all doing wonders," explained the old lady, looking regally Victorian as she lay in bed in her lace-frilled nightgown—"the one I was married in, dearie, and I always saves for sickness"—"but I'm always upset when Felix is off his milk. I've noticed he won't touch it when it's boiled overnight, which makes

me suspicious-like, for you can't get by a cat's nose, can you? I'm not saying they're not clean. You're all very kind, but I'm very particular about my saucepans."

As Diana looked at them, a little family of eight, from the parental two-quarts down to the infantile pints, each upturned, with projecting handles, over the scalloped newspapers covering the kitchen shelf, she wondered how many more of Mrs. Maggs's years would be spent in drilling that small army in the way of cleanliness. For some reason Diana thought of her own mother and the little scared housemaid at the vicarage. Saucepans and plates! How many women's lives were destined to be worn out in their use? Mrs. Maggs had served some fifty years with them. She would serve on until no more her lined hands turned them, bottom upwards, on the shelf, mute witnesses to another day's march nearer Home.

Mr. Jack Moulton, knocking at Diana's door on Saturday morning, and calling cheerily "Beginners, please!" had an immediate response. For Diana was already up and dressed. She felt like Pippa this morning. It was to be a festal day. Cadogan Square would not see her, nor kind Sir Lionel, nor chirrupy Tuppence, nor Lady Glent, visibly critical or invisibly tantalizing, according to the night before.

"Why, what a pretty costume you have on, Diana!" exclaimed Cherry Carmen, walking into her friend's room with a dressing-gown over her pajamas. "I've not seen that before. Brown suits your fair hair and complexion. It makes me look muddy."

"Miss Carmen!" called a voice from below.

"Hello—come up!" she answered, gaily. It was Mr. Moul't's voice.

"Oh no—Cherry, not in here!" cried Diana.

"My dear—why ever not?" asked Cherry, wide-eyed.

"Well—it's not proper, is it?—and you in your pajamas," said Diana.

Cherry flung her arms around her friend and hugged her.

"You little Mrs. Grundy! Do you think the Moul't bird's never seen us with our feathers off? My dearr! I've caught you in your disability!—as our leading comedian used to say, when he wandered in to borrow a little of number two."

Mr. Moul't appeared on the threshold. Cherry Carmen put out a forbidding hand and half closed the door.

"Don't you dare to enter here, or we shall scream, darling. What do you mean by calling on young ladies in their boodwhars, to say nothing of kimonos and pajamas?"

"I say, Miss Carmen, there's a letter for you, and two for Miss Delaney," said Jack Moul't, on the other side of the door.

"We don't believe you! Go away, you designing man! Miss Delaney has just swooned like a Jane Austen girl!" cried Cherry.

"Oh, Mr. Moul't, let me have my letters, please!" called Diana.

A hand came round the door with three letters in it.

"And please take this to Miss Penn-Porter, with my compliments," said Cherry, thrusting the curling-

tongs she carried into the young man's hand. The door closed with a "Righto!" and a bang.

"That's how to treat your husband, my dear," said Cherry, passing Diana's letters.

They tore open their envelopes. Cherry had quickly read hers.

"My God!" she exclaimed. "I'm going to join Mrs. Maggs with heart disease! Listen!"

"THE COSTLINE AGENCY,
LEICESTER SQUARE, W.C.

"DEAR MISS CARMEN:

"Will you please call to see me at eleven o'clock on Monday next. I can offer you a small part, also to understudy Miss Meriel Fillison in *The Right Idea* which starts a Number One Tour of ten weeks on January 2nd.

"Yours faithfully,

"ANDREW J. JACKMAN,

"Manager."

Cherry turned a radiant face to Diana.

"Di, darling—that's the first time Andrew's said anything to me except 'P'r'aps to-morrow, my dear.' Ain't it just marvelous! P'r'aps he's heard of me filming, p'r'aps——"

Suddenly she stopped, open-mouthed, and then, in a flood of comprehension, she threw her arms around Diana.

"Diana! you wicked little angel! You've nagged your poor David! Bless you, darling! Bless David! Bless Andrew! Bless Mr. Wargrave! Bless *The Right Idea*! Bless January the second! Bless the ten weeks! God bless us all! Snakes, I

feel like Tiny Tim at Christmas!" cried Cherry, waving the letter. "If there was another bedrail I'd do a turn on the parallel bars! Diana darling, I'm rich! More fish and chips, more milk for Felix, more trouble for everybody! Oh, do hold me down or I shall hit the ceiling!"

Cherry hugged her again, and then went out to spread the news. Her first act was to commission a portrait from Miss Penn-Porter. "And, darling, you can make it lie like anything. It's to hang outside the theaters in ten different towns. P'r'aps it'll fetch me a millionaire worsted-merchant's son in Bradford. Oh, the tangled skeins of life!"

Diana, now alone, could read her letters quietly. One was from her sister Alice, hoping she had definitely decided to stay with them over Christmas.

"I am sure father will be only too glad to have a reconciliation, especially as the spirit of the season makes it easy. I talk of you quite naturally when at the vicarage. He sits quietly, saying nothing. It is only pride keeps him from talking of you. Stephen has been in trouble again—stayed out at a dance after ten o'clock. There was an awful scene in the study. He called father a 'Victorian antique,' and mother had a terrible job making him apologize next morning. I could not have blamed him if he had left the house, as you did. Dear Diana, who is this blind Sir Lionel Glent? Your letters switch from David to Sir Lionel so suddenly that we simply don't know who has first call on your affections."

The second letter was from her mother.

"DEAR DIANA:

"I am glad to hear you will be with Alice for Christmas. I am hoping your father will receive you here. He never mentions you and makes no comment when I tell him what you are doing, but I am sure he is secretly glad of your success. I am sorry to say he has been ill with bronchitis for a week. He gets so cold sitting in his study so many hours each day, and he has walked miles the last few weeks, collecting money and distributing tickets for the Poor Folks' Dinner, which is to be twice as large this year. He will not spare himself, and now I am nursing him, as he must be about again next week.

"Diana, my darling, who is this Mr. David Hameldon, of whom you write? You mention him in every letter but have not said how you were introduced to him and who he is. I hope he is a nice young man. You should be very careful whom you meet in London. God bless you, darling.

"Your loving mother,

"MARY DELANEY."

Diana read the letter twice. Poor mother, did she imagine London was full of ferocious young men who went about devouring stupid maidens? What a shock for her if she knew the truth, that David had met her in the Goose Fair, and had kissed her the same night on the vicarage doorstep!

Then, as she prepared her breakfast, Diana's thoughts turned to her father. The old tyrant was as bad as ever, with poor Stephen for his victim now she was gone. Joan and Winnie had never had any spirit in them, and Stephen would be battling alone.

Diana felt no anger towards her father now. She began to realize he was the victim of an old tradition in which he had been reared. She could see him still, sitting in his study on the north side of the house, with the broken old gas-fire burning red and blue, making a hissing noise in the bowed grate. But for her he might have had an anthracite stove in his study, he might have been warm and have avoided his cold, and her mother would have been saved all the worry and anxiety of his illness.

It was then, in a mood of compassion, that Diana had an idea. She really owed her mother eight pounds, the money saved for the stove, which had been given her on departure for London. Sir Lionel had given her ten guineas with which to do what she liked. Well, she would make her mother buy that much-desired stove for the study and use the balance for something personal.

It was characteristic of Diana's good heart that she liked to think she was paying a debt, and helping her mother, since her father's chills meant more work in the Delaney household. But deep in her mind was the desire to give her father a little comfort in his chill life. He was a stiff old stick, but he meant well.

There was a sharp tap on Diana's door.

"Miss Delaney," said Miss Penn-Porter, putting her head round the door, "there's a young gentleman below, with a big car, asking for you. I don't know whatever he thought when he saw me—don't deny I'm the charwoman!"

Miss Penn-Porter smiled, her head almost invisible under a mob-cap with funny little scarlet tassels dangling over each ear.

"Oh—it's Mr. Hameldon!" said Diana, excitedly. "Come in, dear—oh, how do I look?"

"Lovely—one day I'm going to sketch you. What a nice young man, Miss Delaney—he's waiting by the car," gasped Miss Penn-Porter.

Diana looked at her and laughed. Then she gave her a quick kiss.

"You darling! I believe you're more flustered than I am!" cried Diana, running to the glass and giving her nose a dab with the powder-puff, and her lips a touch of lipstick—both brands introduced by Cherry. "We're going in the country for the day. Isn't it absurd, I feel like a child at a Sunday-school treat."

"There's nothing absurd in being loved by a nice young man like that—and with a car. If ever I fall in love, he must have a car, I'm so bad on my feet, and aching feet will spoil anything. Oh, you darling, what a chic little hat!"

"Ten shillings for the shape, three for the ribbon, and two for the cherries—does it suit me?" asked Diana, radiant as she plopped it on her head.

"Darling, he'll never be able to drive straight!" cried Miss Penn-Porter, ecstatically.

"Gloves—bag—anything else? No!" exclaimed Diana, flying round the room under the bright eyes of Miss Penn-Porter. "There—I'm off!" cried Diana, with a last glance in the mirror. "Oh, Miss Penn-Porter, isn't life wonderful?" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around the little artist's neck.

"Wonderful, my dear! Enjoy it. You look such a fool at fifty feeling like twenty. There—I've given myself away!" said Miss Penn-Porter, kissing her.

"You don't look a day older than thirty—you know it!" cried Diana, assuringly. "Good-by!"

"Good-by!" answered Miss Penn-Porter, watching Diana fly down the stairs. Then, catching a glimpse of herself, with Nature frankly meeting Nature's daylight—"You silly old fool, what if he did take you for the charwoman!" she said to the vision reproachfully and, sniffing, left the room.

CHAPTER XII

I

DIANA, seated at David's side in the big limousine, could not believe it was true. They were to have a day all to themselves in the country. She had been quite certain it would rain or there would be a fog, but the morning broke sunny and sharp, with the London streets clean and smiling as they threaded their way out through the labyrinth. They left behind them the nondescript Marylebone Road, with its mixture of narrow street-ends, stations, lodging-houses, imposing flats, classic church and town hall. Diana smiled at the policeman on point duty as they turned into Edgware Road. He smiled back. Neither of them knew why, save that Diana's happiness was infectious this bright December morning. Not even the Hogarthian end of Edgware Road could depress her. London was beautiful in all her phases—more beautiful because they were running through it to the country.

She looked at David as he sat there, driving, a pipe in his mouth, the brim of his brown felt hat rakishly curved over his neat ear. Seen thus, his profile was severe and did not prepare one for the playful humor that lurked in his eyes. The long straight nose, firm full mouth and square chin somehow did not belong to the David who could be so boyish. But when he turned and smiled at her, with his fine white teeth, wrinkling his eyes in a way that

was grown dear to her, she found at once that David in whose composition Puck had entered.

Diana sat studying him now, and liked still more this David in charge of a machine. He belonged so to it, with his fine strong hands swinging over the wheel, his steady sight on the road, his expressionless control of the powerful engine. It was an age of steel and speed, and there were steel and speed in the lines of him. Once she felt she would like to let her hand travel along his arm until it could touch that firm, white hand on the steering-wheel.

And then again she looked at him, and all at once she had that queer feeling of infinite detachment, as when one looks at things through reversed field-glasses, and sees them minutely withdrawn, as in another world. Her mother had asked if she knew him, and the question had seemed so ridiculous at the moment. But this firm-lipped young man at the wheel, uniting Mercury and Hephæstus in the Steel Age, was somebody she certainly did not know, perhaps never could know, somebody she loved unthinkingly, reduced to a blind creature by overpowering instinct.

"Bushey, next," he said, as they turned off at Stanmore. "Come nearer, Di."

She moved closer to him and felt his arm slip around her. The next moment he had snatched a swift kiss from her lips, throwing the car back in its track with a deft turn.

"David—you mustn't—it isn't safe!" she scolded.

"Then I'll stop here!" he laughed.

"Don't be silly—we've all day, and people will see us."

"How do you think I can keep my eyes on the

road when I keep side-glimping your mouth? I don't know which are the redder—cherries or lips!"

"Lipstick!" corrected Diana, truthfully.

The car drew up at the side of the road.

"What's the matter?" asked Diana.

"The chauffeur can't stand the strain!" he cried, and before she could utter a protest, he had crushed her to him.

"We shall never get to Tring," said Diana, after a long silence, adjusting her hat. "David, when will you grow up?"

"Never, darling," he said, starting the engine. "I feel like Galuppi!"

"Galuppi?" queried Diana. David had the queerest way of running off the track into regions she had never glimpsed.

"Ah—you don't know your Browning!

"Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop.

What a soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?"

he quoted.

"David," said Diana, with conviction, "you're the most extraordinary person. I believe you could write a book!"

"My dear Diana—it's only an extraordinary person who doesn't write a book these days."

"Then a play," she urged.

"I've enough to do looking after Wargrave's," he said.

"Oh, David—I haven't thanked you for getting

Cherry Carmen a part. The letter came this morning. She's deliriously happy!"

"She really got it herself, the agent spoke highly of her. Wargrave's always glad to find new talent," said David. They were in open country now.

"And one day I'd like to meet Mr. Wargrave—if you think I might?"

"You shall, darling—he's a nice fellow, but frightfully busy."

"There's one thing I particularly wish he'd do," continued Diana.

David looked at her sharply, wondering to what she wished to commit Wargrave.

"I do wish he'd call on Sir Lionel. He talks so much of him, and when he met him he promised to call, but he hasn't been yet," explained Diana.

"Then I'll make him—as soon as he comes back from America."

Diana nestled gratefully against David's shoulder.

"Darling, I thought I wasn't to stop until we got to Tring?"

"No—you mustn't," she said.

"Then don't torture a poor fellow who must keep an eye on the road."

Diana nestled still closer.

"You drive beautifully with one hand, David," she said, provocatively.

And he accepted her verdict forthwith.

II

Towards noon they came to Tring, where they lunched, and immediately afterwards they ran to-

wards the Chiltern Hills, rising to wooded uplands with a panorama of meadows, fields and copses lying mistily in the winter's day. Then they traversed a thick wood, following a red, sandy path, with occasional gamekeepers' cottages in the clearings. Finally, the car swung sharply to the left and halted before a gate.

"This is the beginning of 'Woodwynd,'" said David, getting out to open the gate. They mounted a steep hill, crowned by a copse, and suddenly pulled up in a little courtyard hidden behind a clump of pines.

"Here we are," he said, helping her out.

They walked across the courtyard, with a garage and outbuildings, towards the end of the house, which was low and long, with roofs that came almost to the ground.

"It looks like a cottage by Hans Andersen," remarked Diana, so hidden was it in the bosom of the woodland.

"Wait," said David, leading the way towards a little terrace that ran from the end of the house.

Diana followed him over the flags and turned the corner.

"Oh!" she cried, rooted to the spot in amazement. For suddenly the world had fallen away. The terrace clung to the hillside like a martin's nest. Away there, in the misty afternoon, now glowing crimson over the brown land, they could see stream and meadow, with gray old villages clustered around their squat churches, and the roads, appearing and disappearing, as they wound across the wide lowland.

David led her on until they reached a door in the

center of the long house. He unlocked it, and pushed Diana forward. It was dark inside. She heard the door close behind her, and felt David's arms guiding her from behind. Then another door opened, and before her was a long, low room with beamed ceiling and leaded windows. On the hearth, in the deep recessed fireplace, glowed a log fire.

"David—there's a fire—who made it?"

"A woman from the cottage below. I told her to light it and lay tea," he said. "Come, give me your things."

Tea was set on the table. Diana slipped out of her coat.

"Are we alone?" she asked, pulling off her hat and straightening her hair.

He looked longingly at her slim, boyish figure, with the hair close-cropped over her ears and the lovely line of the nape of her neck.

"Quite alone," he said, unable to resist one kiss on that neck.

He put his arms around her, and her hands went up to his shoulders.

"Do you think we—we should be here—alone?" she asked, hesitatingly, her blue eyes serious and a little fearful.

He laughed and held her to him.

"Silly little goose—from Nottingham Goose Fair!—of course we should. What do you think we've come for?"

She did not answer, but looked around the room, without moving from his arms.

"The woman will come in to make tea?" she asked.

"No—I told her not to come. We shall be quite

alone," he answered, and then, seeing she was perplexed, "Diana, you don't really mind—you're not afraid of being alone with me?"

"No, David—only——" She did not finish the sentence.

"Only what?"

"Oh, I don't know—I've never done this before."

He laughed then, boyishly.

"Those old nuns have filled your head with rubbish," he said.

"David—please don't laugh at the nuns—I was never so happy as when I was there."

"Never?" he emphasized, and forced a smile from her.

"Never—until we met."

There was a long silence. A kettle sang in front of the fire. Outside, in the gray afternoon, the sunset made a crimson rift over the horizon. David drew up a long settee, placing it in front of the fire, on which he threw another log. The room was filled with a warm glow and the resinous odor of burning pine. The light glinted on the pewter plates ranged along a Dutch dresser. It glinted also on a large photograph that Diana picked up in her hands. It was the head and shoulders of a young woman in evening dress. The face was lovely, with candid eyes looking from a broad brow, and tresses of hair looped over the temples. She was about twenty-five, with a rather pleasant mouth, whose corners, hiding in dimples, contradicted the serious eyes.

"Who is this?" asked Diana.

David, who had watched her examine the photograph, was now lighting the candles in an

old wrought-iron chandelier hanging from a beam. "That's Wargrave's fiancée," he said, lighting the last candle in the second tier. The soft light pervaded the room and made Diana as fragile as a figure of porcelain. He watched her for a moment, lost in the beauty of her as she stood there, slim, girlish, her hair haloed with the silver light of the candles.

"I didn't know he was engaged—who is she?" asked Diana.

"Audrey Gloucester—Sir John Gloucester's daughter."

"She is very lovely, isn't she," said Diana, admiringly.

"Very—shall we have tea now? It's four o'clock," he said.

"Have they been engaged long?" asked Diana, still fascinated by the face.

"Since June—she's just come back from America."

"And he's going there—poor things! Oh, David, she must be feeling just as I am at the thought of your going."

"I don't think she minds much, Diana—not so much," he added.

She turned a surprised, questioning face to him.

"But they're in love!—and she has only just come home!"

He walked over to her and took the photograph from her hands.

"I say, I shall be quite jealous of Wargrave soon if you get so concerned over them," he laughed.

"And your sympathy may all be wasted."

There was a little hardness in his voice that displeased Diana.

"David—how can you say that! I shall think you don't mind leaving me!"

"My dear girl!" protested David. "I say, Diana, we didn't come down here to talk about them!"

"But I feel they've been happy here—in this room, in the garden and the woods. They are happy, aren't they, David?"

The next moment she felt his arms about her, and her question was sealed on her lips.

"You inquisitive little fairy. I positively refuse to admit their existence for the time being. Tea, darling!"

He released her, watching her pour the hot water into the teapot.

"When must we leave, David?"

"My dear, we're hardly here yet! We can dine down in Tring at eight o'clock. We should be home easily by eleven. That gives us nearly three hours here. Yes, two lumps, please."

It was a very ordinary tea, but never, to Diana and David, had there been such an enjoyable one.

"Let's stay here forever!" said Diana, gazing into the fire now filling the room with a red glow. There was nothing but the slow beat of the grandfather clock at the dark end of the room and the occasional stir and crackle of the logs.

David looked at her, the warm light playing over her face, brow and hair, and suddenly the exquisite frailty, the indescribable loveliness of her, stirring through his whole being, caught him up. With a low cry of worship he slipped to his knees beside her, his head against her shoulder.

"Diana," he said, gently.

She looked down into his eyes, bright with the glow of his passion for her.

"David!" Her lips met his upturned mouth.

They clung thus, in the wonder of their hunger for each other.

"Diana—Diana, I love you," he said. "I have always loved you, Diana."

She could not answer for a while, but clung to him, hearing the moments pass over her with the beat of the old clock.

"David—I love you," she breathed at last.

He strained her to him, kissing her mouth, her hair, her eyes, while her hands passed over his head in the ecstasy of his fervor. It was as if a tide were rising in her ears. He caught her up, transfusing her with his own passion. They felt nothing of time and place. They were young, they were happy beyond thought. All she knew was his tenderness, the deep ache in her heart for him.

"Diana!" he said. And to her it was like a name in the night, out of a dream. She could not answer to the wonder of it. Fear no longer touched her. In her hunger for him she trusted implicitly, with a need so strong that it must be well.

The minutes passed. Outside, the night fell over field and woodland. The logs crackled on the hearth, sending the light of their flames flickering over walls and ceiling, gleaming rosily on pewter and brass, and making the shadows as velvet. They were so warm, so happy, so wonderfully alone, with the country silence to fold them in. In the utter contentment of their hearts they had no words to speak, their breathing as one, as they lay in each other's arms. The fire burnt lower, the shadows

grew heavier, encroaching upon them. The spent candles guttered in their sockets. The clock marked with heavier beat the moments of their rapture. They heard a rising wind sigh through the trees, and pass; again the silence flooded the evening. It had been like the long sigh of their own hearts in this incommunicable bliss. He felt the light flutter of her lashes on his cheek, and half glimpsed the brightness of her eyes, more splendid in the dimness of the room, the softer glow of the embers. And then the rapidly dying fire brought them to trivial necessity. He stirred in her embrace.

"David?"

"Diana!"

Again their names echoed to each other's wonder, were answered on each other's lips. But this time there was a consciousness of the minutes weighing on them, and, as if to impress the fact, the clock rumbled, with a wheeziness of wheels, and then, with a clumsy labor, struck the hour. It was seven.

"The fire will go out," she said.

"Yes."

And again the silence as she lay against him.

"David, we must go!" she whispered.

"Yes, we must, my darling," he answered, but he did not stir.

Finally it was she who, with hands over his brow, held back his face, their eyes lost in each other's, exploring the half-sensed loveliness in that darkness.

"We must go, David, please!"

He kissed her again, almost despairingly, so that she winced under the ardor of it, and then rose to his feet, pulling her up with him. He waited awhile, gazing at her dazedly as she busied herself

with her hair and dress. Then he went to her, taking her again in his arms.

"Diana, this has been wonderful—need we ever go?" he cried.

"Never!" she laughed against him, with moist eyes searching his face.

"Never!" he repeated. "How marvelous they are, those words!"

"What words, David?"

"What the old clock is saying, 'Never—ever—never—ever!'"

"We can come again?" she asked.

"Yes—often, Diana."

"But it will never be like this—just like this," she said, sadly.

"It will be more wonderful!" he promised.

"That's not possible," she answered, wise in Fate.

"Things are never as wonderful again."

He laughed and kissed her, a little fearfully, for he knew it was true, and was reluctant to know it.

"The room's cold," he said, suddenly releasing her. "And you must be hungry, darling. We'll have a nice little dinner in Tring."

They put on their coats and gathered their things together.

On the threshold of the room they paused. David had drawn the curtains back, and a full moon latticed the darkness with its light. The room seemed tranquil in the aftermath of their love. They gazed at it with unspoken thoughts. And then David shut the door.

Outside, the night was cold and clear. The infinite distance of the earth lay in a flood of moonlight, out of which the black copses rose like islands.

From the terrace the silver-gray world had an unreality in keeping with the enchantment of the silent cottage.

David wrapped her about with rugs, and with the smooth purr of the engine for friendly companionship, they ran towards the valley and the life of a world they had forgotten.

CHAPTER XIII

THE last day came, and they thought it fitting that their farewell should be by the Diana fountain where so often, in those lunch hours, they had met. The December day was cold, with a sleety, wind-borne rain. The wet walks, barren, dripping trees and the gray-green lawn about the fountain, seemed in keeping with their desolate mood. For Diana, life without David had become an unimaginable thing, and his going would make London a wilderness. Only that morning Cherry, detecting her despondent mood, had scolded her for being so foolish.

"A month—that's all you say he's to be away. My dear, it's very unwise to let any young snoop see he's become such an obsession in a girl's mind. Now, just kiss him brightly and say 'Cheerio!' That'll make him hurry back in case you change your mind with waiting."

Yes, it was easy for Cherry to talk. There had been no David in her life. Moreover, this parting made Diana, for the first time, speculate concerning the future. Neither she nor David had made any allusion to it. But the end of loving and courtship was marriage, and while Diana realized it was yet early to make any plans, it was not unreasonable to entertain hopes. David, however, never alluded to or hinted at such a consummation. Diana, herself, could not. She would have demurred immediately had he suggested any pledge between them. Two months—that was almost the extent of their knowl-

edge of each other. And yet, felt Diana, her whole life had been spanned by those two months; the years preceding them had been only a time of preparation for the great event of their meeting.

They walked along Rotten Row towards the Albert Memorial, and then turned southwards to the Round Pond. To-day no happy children sailed their ships under the eyes of watchful nursemaids. The place was damp and deserted.

He promised to write, but it would be almost a fortnight before she could receive a letter. He would be back by the end of January.

"We'll celebrate my return with another day at the cottage," he said.

"David, I feel we shall never go there again—things like that can never happen twice!" she answered.

He laughed and shook her by the arm. They were now back again at the Diana Fountain. She had to return to Cadogan Square soon.

"Leave me here, David—it will be easier here," she said. It was in her mind that the walk back to Cadogan Square would give time for composure. Poor Sir Lionel's blindness was a benefit to her this afternoon. He would not see any signs of her distress, but his ears were quick and she would have to control her voice.

"You'll think I'm a weak little fool, David!" she said, smiling at him mistily, as he held her. The walks were deserted, but they were too much alone in their hearts to heed who passed them by.

"I'm afraid of what I've done to you," he said, gravely.

"Why?"

"You love me so, Diana, it makes me afraid," he said.

"Afraid—of what, David?" she cried, scanning his face, that wore an expression of perplexity and pain.

"Our vulnerability—you have an arrow, Diana!" he said, with a sad, forced smile. "*Les douces flèches.*"

"I don't understand," she murmured, hiding her face on his chest.

He made no answer, and she could not see the emotion working in his face, in the quivering of his hands as he held her.

"And now——" he said, at last, when their silence was unendurable.

Their lips met, briefly, since they dare not linger. He turned, holding her hands, towards the statue. Perhaps he registered a vow in that silent regard of the virgin huntress, whose smooth limbs shone in the rain.

"Good-by, Diana," he said, and it was a farewell to both.

"Good-by, David," she replied.

He caught a swift glimpse of her smiling eyes, of red, wind-whipped cheeks, half-hidden by the up-turned collar of her yellow mackintosh. Then she was gone.

For a few minutes he did not move. Purposely he averted his face from the direction of her going, as if watching might hurt her. He stood motionless, listening to the dripping of rain from the branches, seeing the gleaming body of the bronze Diana, and feeling, deep in the heart's core, the pangs of futile contrition.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. RONALD CAINE was a good example of what could be done with a pleasing personality. The son of a Kidderminster solicitor, educated at the local Grammar School, he had sat on a stool in his father's office for two years as an articled clerk. The law's delays providing him with no insolence of office, he looked around for a little more excitement, and found it, in the person of Miss Letty London, who visited the town once a week to initiate the daughters of rich carpet manufacturers in the latest ballroom frivolities.

Mr. Caine was wise enough, at twenty, to realize that it was useless to cast eyes on the numerous pretty girls attending Miss London's classes. Conveyancing at five hundred a year had small chance of mating with carpets at five thousand a year. The Caine boy was useful in a place short of male partners, he was ornamental at dinner parties, and nicely mannered and ready to stand out at tennis parties, but to matrons he was matrimonially negligible. He was poor old Caine's boy, and early he realized the mark of Caine was upon him.

Miss Letty London, who stood for release from shiny trousers on high stools, was a blithe young lady who had learned her art and lost her prejudices in Paris. By tremendous energy and a fine pair of legs she had succeeded in establishing herself and three sisters, whose remarkable beauty had caused them to be known in their father's lifetime, as

"London's Three Graces." Letty's dance-rooms in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Warwick, Leamington and Kidderminster were really exhibition salons for the "Three Graces."

Letty, known as the chief instructor, had coupled with her lessons the art of broking. She weeded out the ineligible with a firm hand, and at the moment of Mr. Caine's advent as dancing partner, Mildred was engaged to the Honorable James Luton, and Sybil was being courted by Jack Mullinger, of the Mullinger Carpet Company, of which he was, at thirty-five, the enterprising managing director, with a fortune of a quarter of a million made out of cheap rugs.

Clarice, with two years to run yet, and the prettiest eyes and sharpest temper of the three, was still up for auction. Letty sometimes got angry with her. It was preposterous to allow a matter of color to interfere with conquest, for Clarice insisted on a dark man. It happened that Ronald Caine was dark. After two months at Miss London's academies as dancing partner, she saw in him a menace to Clarice's future, and he had to go.

But he was now in the channels of adventure. He next turned up at a Hammersmith dance-hall, as one of those well-groomed mannequins who, for a shilling, will dance with a lonely lady. At that stage he grew side-whiskers and allowed his dress trousers to be slightly belled at the bottom. Frequently he was asked if he had ever been on the films and, wearied with saying No, one day he went to Elstree. His luck was in; time, place and side-whiskers coincided. He opportunely appeared for a seduction scene in Buenos Aires.

He earned sufficient in these three weeks to keep him for three months in a small room in Mayfair. It looked out upon Ducking Pond Mews, but he was able, by adroit dodging, to make it appear that he lived at the Moonflower Hotel nearby. Ronald considered it a good investment to lunch there each day, in return for which he wrote from, and had his letters addressed to, the hotel, "pending his moving there from his rooms, which he was giving up." Thirteen guineas went to a good tailor, since terms were cash. He spent his mornings writing a semi-autographical novel, his afternoons in the hotel, where they had *thé dansant*.

The day he came to his last five-pound note he obtained a post as companion guide to an American girl. It was his duty to take her about and dance with her. He was appointed by her mother, with whom he had danced and flirted in the Moonflower Hotel. This arrangement proved satisfactory to mother and daughter, and most satisfactory to Ronald. He conducted them on a tour of the historic places of Britain, and turned up one day for lunch at the "Lion" in Kidderminster, in a Rolls-Royce car, accompanied by two ladies, obviously born in America and gowned in Paris. It was a sweet revenge on the mammas of his home town, who scented an heiress romance.

This arrangement, so satisfactory to all parties, ended with the flight of the swallows South and of the gold-birds West. Meanwhile Ronnie had kept a look-out for stepping-stones. His novel appeared, was "acclaimed" by the Press, which was not, these days, so foolish as to condemn a first novel, which might be by a future Dickens. It sold six hundred

copies, and as he received no royalties until two thousand were sold, the net result was a bill for ten pounds for typing and two for review clippings. Ronald, being an alert young man, saw that it was easier to go from sensation to sales, than from sales to sensation.

He now studied the art of being notorious, and hit upon the bright idea of having his suits lined with crimson silk and wearing the cuffs turned back. This resulted in paragraphs in every gossip column about "handsome Ronald Caine, the well-known actor-novelist." A more tangible result was another engagement at the studios, since his face, particularly the profile, had now a publicity value.

Never quite a success in anything he undertook, for the seventh wave always missed him, that early scare in a Mayfair back bedroom had taught him to be cautious, unlike his other adventurous associates. In six years, having invested ten thousand pounds in solid securities, he decided to stand for Parliament and spend a thousand in being a rising young man. It was a thousand well spent. He lost the election but gained a private secretaryship, worth a thousand a year, to Sir John Gloucester, the chairman of the Golgar Oil Company and of the local political organization.

Ronnie saw the next step clearly, an altar one, with his employer's daughter before it. Unhappily, that position had been engaged by her cousin, Arthur Wargrave. A more half-hearted engagement he had never seen. He had no doubts about Sir John. His ability had commended him to that gentleman, and as for Lady Gloucester, that comfortable creature had responded quickly to his solicitous care of

her needs. She often remarked, "I feel as if Ronnie were one of my own." Ronnie was sorely tempted to say, "And why not?"

He was thinking of these things when the door of his room in the Gloucester household, used as an office, opened suddenly.

"Hello, Ronnie—did you see Arthur at your club?"

It was Audrey, already dressed for the evening, in a silver gown that fitted her slim body, emphasizing its suppleness. She looked like Lilith the Temptress, this evening, he thought.

Caine leaned back in his chair.

"No—he wasn't there—why?" he asked, looking at her slowly.

"Well, I'm supposed to be dining at Claridge's at eight—it's our last night. Arthur said he'd ring up this morning, confirming it. We're going on to the Grattans' dance at the Savoy afterwards."

"That's too bad. Why not ring up Bruton Street—shall I?" asked Caine.

"I have—Mr. Hameldon says Arthur's been out all day. You know he sails in the morning—I've seen nothing of him. I know he's busy but——"

Caine got up from his chair, glancing at his wrist-watch. It was seven o'clock.

"I'll go and change, and be back here at a quarter to eight," he said, looking at her with such open admiration that she could not mistake the nature of his regard. "If Arthur doesn't turn up, I'll take you out to dinner and on to the Grattans'."

She did not answer for a moment, playing with a paper-knife on his desk.

"Thanks, Ronnie—but we'd better not," she said, slowly.

"Better not—why?" he asked, with feigned surprise.

"Well, it would not—it—I'm sure he'll come. Thank you so much, Ronnie."

She put down the knife and turned to go.

"Audrey!"

She halted in the doorway as he spoke and waited, with one hand on her hip.

"I want to speak to you," he said, shortly. The color came and went in her face, but her eyes were resolute.

They looked at each other in silence awhile, then, stepping back into the room, Audrey Gloucester closed the door behind her.

"Well?" she said, simply, and he knew from that one quiet word, without surprise or real questioning in it, she divined all that he was going to say.

"Can't you see how impossible it's going to be, Audrey? You must forgive my asking you this," he said, going towards her, so that only a few inches separated his dark face from hers. "Things have been no better since you came back. Arthur's a good fellow, but you must feel that——"

He faltered. There was no sign of encouragement in her eyes. She showed neither surprise nor resentment. It was the same baffling attitude of aloofness which had puzzled and checked him for four months.

"I must feel what?" she persisted, running her frail white hands across the back of a chair, the only indication she showed of anything unusual in their talk.

"Audrey—you really don't care about one another. Do you think I haven't seen it? Could either of you be so indifferent to each other if you did care?"

Still there was no change in her face. God, she could be marble when she wished. Not for the first time he was conscious of a queer pleasure which her coldness aroused in him. Had she been pliant he might have felt his intention was slightly villainous. No one could ever say she had been swayed by a stronger will. She inherited old Gloucester's iron way.

"You won't see Arthur again until he returns—in the New Year—and it may be late in the New Year," he said, quietly, letting his hands rest on the top of hers. The coldness of them surprised him.

"Whatever do you mean—he's coming back in five weeks," she said, quickly.

"You believe that?" he asked.

"Yes—he's not a person to run away."

"Then there's something to run away from—you've felt that, Audrey? I knew you had. Why don't you end the ghastly mistake?" asked Caine. His mask was down now. Either she would check him at once or he might go on.

"Audrey—you've never cared about Arthur—you've both slipped into it, following everybody's idea. I can't let you throw yourself away."

For the first time she showed the effect of his words. Her eyes lit with a sudden flame, not of anger, but of intensity.

"You can't let me? Ronnie, please don't say that!" she cried.

"I must say it, Audrey. I wouldn't say it if I were wronging Arthur in any way. I'll say just the same to him. He's accepted you as a fact. Your engagement has sprung from nothing more than long association. If I had met you first——"

He thought he had gone too far then, for she suddenly withdrew her hands from his, with a frightened, questioning expression on her face.

"Ronnie—you're not proposing to me?" she cried. There was a note of laughter in her question which hurt him. "Don't be silly!"

"Silly?" he repeated, unable to believe his ears. "You find it silly that I should care enough to warn you against this stupid engagement? I'm sorry you should think me silly, Audrey."

The vanity of the man, she thought. The colossal stupidity and blindness. She wanted to laugh outright before his face. And he was so astute in some things, so very astute, that throughout those four months in America she had made no attempt to deceive him. And now he showed himself so obsessed with his own interests, more obsessed than Arthur, who at least had made no pretense of a great interest in her since her return.

"I think you're incredibly silly, Ronnie," she answered, without anger, but leaving nothing unexpressed in the scorn of her voice. "You can't have the slightest understanding of me, or you'd never have said this."

Caine saw she was going, and he knew that this moment meant victory or defeat. He stepped forward to check her, taking hold of her by the arms. Her face met his without a tremor.

"Audrey, I can't let you go, misunderstanding me. I love you. God knows why you should find it silly in a man to tell you that. If I knew you loved Arthur my mouth would be shut, but I know you don't. I know more, I know he doesn't love you. You are both acting dead rôles. You've slipped into this situation almost without knowing what it entails. Now you find marriage unthinkable, and neither of you has the courage to say so, but you go on pin-pricking each other and being pathetically polite in your moments of contrition. Don't you think I've seen it, don't you——"

With a calm determination that checked him, she shook off his hands, looking steadily at him.

"I know you've seen it—seen all that," she emphasized, "but that you couldn't see something else, beyond your own interests, fills me with amazement!"

He stared at her, and she held his eyes with her own, unflinchingly.

"I don't understand, Audrey," he said, bewildered.

"Obviously you don't, Ronnie, so it's not worth our discussing the matter any further."

"But, Audrey——"

He broke off, for the door suddenly opened. On the threshold stood Wargrave, in dress clothes.

"Hello, Audrey—they said you were up here. Giving Ronnie a hand?" he asked, coming into the room and kissing her. It was on her tongue to say, "Yes—a backhand," but she spared him, and gratefully accepted Wargrave's intervention.

"I was wondering if you'd forgotten?" she said, as he released her.

"Of course not!" answered Wargrave. "I've left Hameldon in the thick of it. He's dining out, too. I shan't get to bed to-night. Are you coming on to the dance, Ronnie?"

Caine opened a file, searching for something. He could not yet believe he had failed. There was no reason for it. Silly, that was the strangest, hardest of all words she could have used. He was too perturbed by her reception of his attempt to feel any shame in Wargrave's presence at this critical moment.

"Going to the Grattans'? No, I'm fixed up, Arthur," he said, not raising his head from the file.

"Then cheerio!" cried Wargrave, slipping his arm through Audrey's.

They went. He heard the door close, and stood thinking, his hands resting on the file. He was utterly puzzled. She was quite beyond him. It was the first time in his life he had felt anything was beyond him. It was the first time any one had considered him silly. That hurt more than the rejection.

At a quarter to eight he rang up Mrs. Winnaker, the American widow staying at the Ritz, who had come over to get her boy into Eton. She was in, and when he asked her whether she would care to dine quietly with him somewhere, she insisted, as he had hoped, that he should go and dine quietly with her. He had been simply too wonderful with Dickie, taking him out, and being so attentive to the boy, who liked him enormously.

As Ronnie Caine dressed, he wondered how he could find out whether the Winnaker millions had been tied up on the widow or the boy.

CHAPTER XV

DIANA, aware that there is salvation for the depressed in work, did not spare herself upon her return to Cadogan Square. She immediately tackled the most unpleasant task she had found in the house, namely, obtaining from the impassive Johnson an explanation of some of the household bills. Diana could not help feeling that the butler regarded her more as an impertinence than an enemy. Whenever she took exception to some of his methods of payment, he merely observed that it had always been done so, that he had been with the Glents for seventeen years, and he presumed they were quite satisfied with his way of doing things.

His way, for Diana, was certainly a confusing one. He paid all the tradesmen by check from his own private account, and presented Lady Glent with the receipts and a monthly bill of his own to meet them. When Diana suggested she should pay the accounts direct, Johnson looked at her aloofly, and said he must insist on confidence being shown in his ability to deal direct with the tradesmen. Diana saw the battle was set, but she took time to consider her forces before throwing down the gage.

Lady Glent was proving an unknown quantity. There were days when Diana did everything that was wrong, when she was incredibly stupid, inclined to be impertinent and altogether too presumptuous in her attention towards Sir Lionel. But other days

there was such an excess of affection from Lady Glent that Diana, by now accustomed to all the symptoms that foreran an orgy, joined forces with Mason, her maid, and the omniscient Johnson. From the latter down to Tuppence, there was a determination to protect Sir Lionel from the knowledge of these outbreaks. Sometimes it proved impossible to keep him ignorant, but generally Lady Glent was kept away on one pretext or another. What Sir Lionel surmised in those absences no one knew, for he never asked for his mother.

This coöperation for Sir Lionel's comfort made Diana's task difficult when she found herself in conflict with some member of the household, particularly since, as in the case with Johnson, in many respects so admirable, she had to seek an ally in Lady Glent.

Diana was considering her plan of campaign, having gathered together her letters, when Tuppence knocked on the door and entered, breathless from flights too rapidly taken.

"Miss Delaney, please, Sir Lionel wishes you to have tea with him and let him have the letters about the house at Nice," he said, panting by her desk.

Diana looked at him, and in an attempt to be severe, remarked—"You should not rush into a room in such a breathless manner. And you've two buttons off your coat, Tuppence. Also I think it scandalous that a small child like you should have his fingers stained yellow with nicotine!"

"Small child, Miss Delaney? I'm nearly fifteen!" protested the boy.

"A tremendous age, Tuppence. Does Sir Lionel know you smoke?"

"Yes, miss—he gives me cigarettes!" answered Tuppence, triumphantly.

"I'm surprised at Sir Lionel. I'm sure he doesn't know your fingers are yellow," said Diana, determined not to smile, although the boy's face was a natural provocation to mirth. "You can post those letters for me—I'm coming downstairs now."

Diana took the Nice correspondence off the file and went down to Sir Lionel's room. Hilton had just brought in tea, and almost as soon as Diana had entered, Lady Glent came in.

"Here are the letters from the agent at Nice," said Diana, opening the folder.

"Thanks, I want mother to look at them. She thinks the villa's too much," said Sir Lionel. "Now, mother, we must make up our minds to-night, they won't keep the offer open."

Lady Glent read through the last letter.

"The Promenade des Anglais may be noisy," she said at length. "Don't you remember, when we were at the Negresco, two years ago, what a lot of traffic went up and down it?"

"But this is set back from the road, behind a long garden—you'll not hear the noise there," answered Sir Lionel. "I like the idea of that unobstructed view over the Baie des Anges."

Lady Glent and Diana exchanged a swift look. There would have been something absurd in a blind man wanting a good view, if it had not the pathos of unbreakable courage. He refused to change his way of life and had retained all his zest for it.

"Very well, if your heart's set on it, we'll take the Villa Dardanelli," agreed Lady Glent. "We

don't want it for four months, but I suppose we'll have to take it for that period or lose it."

The door opened and Tuppence entered. In a moment there was uproar. Thingummy and Jingly, who had been dozing with one eye open, near Sir Lionel's chair, were alert in a second, and had bounded across to the page-boy with noisy welcome. It was the hour when Tuppence took them for their evening walk.

"Oh, those dogs, Leo! I do wish you'd train them to be quiet. Wretches! Hurry them off, Tuppence!" cried Lady Glent.

"Yes, m'lady," answered the boy, making frantic efforts to hold the dogs while he fastened the leashes on their collars.

"I like to hear the little beggars—wish I could get as much excitement out of a walk," said Sir Lionel. "It used to be quite exciting going down Piccadilly when I was first blind, but now I know every curb and corner."

"Leo, you used to frighten me horribly when you first went out alone. You didn't know I had Hilton following you until you were safe in your club!" confessed Lady Glent, pouring out the tea. "Miss Delaney, he simply would not realize the risks he ran!"

"How could I, mother!" asked Sir Lionel, gaily. "That's the beauty of being blind, you don't see the risks you run. Good-by, Thingummy! Be good, Jingly!" he shouted to the dogs as he heard Tuppence leave the room.

"Do you know, Miss Delaney, I feel far more sorry for those dogs than I do for myself," said Sir Lionel. "Dogs have such a rotten time cooped

up in London. They ought to be able to run about in the country."

"I don't see it, my dear," said Lady Glent, decisively. "Your sympathy's wasted. They have quite a good time. There are always the lamps and pillar boxes. And talking of boxes, I've one for the opera to-night. Beecham's conducting. I can't go—I've promised to play bridge at Lady Cornaway's."

"What is it?" asked Sir Lionel, replacing his teacup on the table with a certainty of position that never ceased to fascinate Diana. He lit a cigarette with the same skill. How was it he knew exactly when the match flame touched the cigarette end—he never sooted the paper.

"*Madame Butterfly*," answered Lady Glent. "Now, why don't you take Miss Delaney to see it—she's been working terribly hard, and is now subduing Johnson."

"*Butterfly*—hurrah!—then we're going! Miss Delaney, don't say you can't, or I'll never forgive you!" cried Sir Lionel. "I've a passion for *Butterfly*. It would be perfect if it weren't for Mr. Pinkerton—he's the fly in the butter. How could they call a man Pinkerton in an opera!"

Diana did not answer at once. That Lady Glent should suggest her going was astonishing. There were times when she seemed suspicious of the growing bonds between her and Sir Lionel. Of late Lady Glent had brought her needlework into the room, on the pretext of listening to Diana reading to her son. It had not deceived Diana, nor Sir Lionel, who one day had suddenly changed the reading hour when he knew his mother was out.

She had also heard the gossip in the household about Lady Glent's passion for her son, which made her watch over all the visits of any one likely to attract his affections. There had been a lively game of hide-and-seek for three months between Lady Glent and Lord Hodden's eldest daughter, who had been suspiciously kind to poor dear Sir Lionel. Lady Glent's selfish seclusion of her son had become a popular scandal among the matchmakers of May-fair.

Knowing these facts, Diana swiftly divined the motive underlying Lady Glent's remarkable change of front. These last few days she had done everything to encourage, just as before she had done everything to discourage, Sir Lionel's desire for her company. Lady Glent had decided that if her son must have feminine companionship, it was safer that he should seek it in her secretary than with some person socially considerable as a lover.

Diana, arriving at this discovery, was as angry as she was amused. Lady Glent had most artfully drawn from her some confidences concerning her love of David. These had reassured her so much that she now saw no danger to Sir Lionel. Hence this changed attitude and the invitation to accompany him to the opera.

"You will take me, won't you?" asked Sir Lionel, wondering why Diana had not answered his question. "You've heard *Butterfly*?"

"I've never been to the opera," confessed Diana. "I should love to go, Sir Lionel."

"Good Lord! Never been to any opera?" he cried in astonishment.

"No—never. You took me to my first theater."

Sir Lionel brought his hands down with a bang on the chair arms.

"Mother—this ought to be in a book. Here's a highly intelligent young lady of twenty who——"

"Twenty-one," emphasized Diana, laughingly.

"Twenty-one—that's worse!—who's never been to an opera! I'll bet, Miss Delaney, you've never been to a race meeting, or seen the gee-gee's go over the sticks, nor even a Hunt point-to-point?"

"No—none of those, Sir Lionel!" laughed Diana.

"Do you wonder I ran away from home? My father's a very good man, but he refuses to let the world change his ideas. That's why I found it intolerable. It was a sin to stay out after ten o'clock."

"Good Lord!" groaned Sir Lionel. "Are all the provinces like that?"

"Oh, dear no!" exclaimed Lady Glent. "They can show us a few ways of enjoying life without staying up till dawn. Don't you remember that old squire down in Leicestershire last spring, who was eighty-two and said he hadn't missed a Derby for thirty-seven years?"

"He was a naughty old man, darling," answered her son. "They swore he hadn't been sober since Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and he still believed Disraeli was Prime Minister."

Lady Glent rang for the footman to take away the tea-tray. When he had gone she turned to her son.

"I've been talking to Miss Delaney about coming to the Riviera with us. She understood that it would be necessary when I engaged her, but I've told her we should be willing to make some kind of arrangement if she wished to stay in England. She

could go down to Dunetree and help with the inventory."

"But of course you're coming, Miss Delaney!" cried Sir Lionel. "I couldn't move without you—could I, mother?"

"Sir Lionel! You know you don't need any one to lead you about," said Diana. "I was only thinking that, if Lady Glent didn't mind, I might——"

But he would not let her finish. Of course she was coming. He had never for one moment expected otherwise. And the Riviera, she would love it. The sea, the blue sky, the sun, the flowers, tennis.

"And gambling at Monte Carlo! You'll take me to the casino, and put stakes on the table for me!" he cried.

"But I know nothing about it, Sir Lionel!" said Diana, smiling at his eagerness.

"Good—neither do I, but I have blind man's luck," he answered.

The Riviera! There would be a lovely villa with a garden full of flowers; palm trees and promenades by the sea—a blue sea, with a summer-soft sky overhead when London was blackened with fog and sodden with rain. And there would be women in dainty frocks, and well-groomed men sitting on the terraces of great, balconied hotels, with luxurious lounges, brilliant ballrooms and bright dining-rooms, where French meals were served to exquisite music. She would meet the gay world that had escaped anxiety as well as cold and fog. She would move in a playground where the fortunate children of the world laughed through the day and gambled through the night. Frivolous, wicked perhaps, most certainly

wicked in the eyes of her austere father, but oh, how charmingly wicked! There were moments when a villain, if he were well-groomed, was a tonic in a drab existence.

She was becoming used now to luxuriously furnished houses, well-dressed, well-placed men and women, commanding polite servants, cars, means of travel, and all that freedom which wealth ensures, putting the world into livery for its service. True, she too was a servant in a sense, but it was in a pleasant sense, and with Sir Lionel's kind manner no visible servitude.

But Diana hesitated, much as she felt the lure of the life on a coast where winter spends summer. If she went she would not be in London again until the middle of March, and David returned at the end of January. When he came home and found she was not here, that she had gone for nearly three months—what then?

And she, too, not seeing David for three months—could that be endured cheerfully? Far better not go than go to pine, to cast a shadow where shadows fell so heavily in that laughter-laden place. If she demurred Lady Glent would give her work at Dunetree, and there was Lady Glent's sister at Richmond, with her Welfare Work, which seemed to be coming Diana's way in increasing volume.

Diana wavered, foolish as her wavering would have seemed at any other time, for any other cause. But Sir Lionel's enthusiasm carried away whatever reluctance she felt. Yes, she was going. She would wake in the morning with the sound of the sea coming through her windows, live amid the scent of flowers, with an evening view of crimson sunsets

over Montboron and its ruined castle, where the pine-crested promontory blackened in the dusk when night came over the sea; when Nice, with its lights, lay like a jewel in the bosom of the hills.

It was all settled; they were to leave on the first of January, and Diana felt happy in that she had not been quite free to make her choice. Sir Lionel had insisted, and by insisting had taken from her the feeling of disloyalty to David. She wished it had been possible to have told him before they had parted. But, then, she had almost decided not to go, and thought it unnecessary to alarm him.

Diana went up to her room and typed the letter renting the Villa Dardanelli. She brought it downstairs for Sir Lionel to sign. As she entered, the dogs scampered in, dragging a red-cheeked Tuppence.

"If you please, sir, Thingummy's bit a boy and the policeman's taken him to the chemist's, and's taken your name and says we shall hear something in the mornin'," recited Tuppence, breathlessly.

Thingummy rubbed an exploring nose round Sir Lionel's leg, obviously excited by his exploit.

"Good heavens! How did that happen?" asked Sir Lionel.

"Well, sir, Thingummy and Jingummy, and another dog coming round the corner, got their leashes mixed up, and they began to fight, and the boy pulled his, and I pulled ours, and the dogs got more excited, and he got bit," explained Tuppence, with eyes still glowing from the excitement.

"Who was bitten, Tuppence—the boy? You're as mixed up as the dogs."

"Yes, Sir Lionel—he got 'im in the calf. He did yell. But it was an accident, sir."

"Thingummy!" called Sir Lionel.

Thingummy immediately sat up, front paws touching.

"You are charged with a grave and unprovoked assault upon a small boy. The sentence of the court is that you be deprived of sugar for a week!"

"But, please, sir," exclaimed Tuppence, anxiously, "I'm not sure it was Thingummy—it might have been Jingummy. They twisted round so quick I couldn't see them!"

"God bless my soul! Tuppence, you're about as reliable as a policeman on the speed of a car. Well, I can't punish both dogs. Thingummy, you're acquitted."

Tuppence looked at the dogs. They were covered with the mud in which they had rolled.

"Please, Sir Lionel, shall I wash the dogs—they're all over mud," he asked.

"Yes—and I hope the scamps get the soap in their eyes!"

The grinning Tuppence led the fighters away.

"Miss Delaney, I expect we'll have the mother of a small boy round here in the morning. I hope the poor child hasn't lost much of his leg," said Sir Lionel.

Diana gave him the letter to sign.

"I'm going now, Sir Lionel. I want to dress for the theater. Shall I meet you there?" she asked.

He signed the letter, and seemed to be thinking hard.

"No—I'll call for you at George Street, at eight o'clock," he said, slowly.

Diana left him, wondering at his unusual gravity. She would have been still more perturbed could she have known the reason of it. For Sir Lionel could not determine whether her singular reluctance to go to the Riviera was due to a scarcity of those pretty frocks which a girl finds necessary at such places, or whether there was an attraction in London stronger than anything to be found on the Côte d'Azur. He purposely refrained from asking anything about Mr. Hameldon.

CHAPTER XVI

I

MRS. MAGGS was happy. She was about again. The brass numbers on the front door shone, the saucepan bore no bar sinister on its gleaming bottom, Felix had not suggested by any show of reluctance that the freshness of the milk was doubtful. Every one had been wonderfully kind. In fact, there had been a conspiracy to keep her in bed, which she had had to thwart deliberately. It was nice of the young people to show that they cared anything about a faded old creature like herself. Even Miss Penn-Porter, who wasn't in the slightest degree domesticated, and didn't know whether eggs took two or twenty minutes to boil, had gone out of her way to be helpful, kind soul. She had emptied ashes and tried to make a fire, which simply wouldn't go, until Mr. Moulton had suggested sprinkling a little paraffin on it.

"And who taught you that dodge, Mr. Moulton?" Mrs. Maggs demanded.

"I often saw my mother do it when she couldn't get the kitchen fire to go," had answered Mr. Moulton in an unguarded moment. For, as Mrs. Maggs reflected, if his mother had had anything to do with lighting kitchen fires, those other hints about the Moulton country establishment, with hot-houses and horses, grooms and maids, became, as shrewd Mrs. Maggs had always suspected, decidedly "fishy." But he was a well-meaning young

man for all his airs about descending from Berkeley Square. She had always thought his silk shirts and underclothing a gross extravagance for any one in his position, but then, it was better than drink or looseness. And he was good-hearted. Those black grapes must have cost him four-and-sixpence a pound.

Mr. Moulton and Miss Penn-Porter got on very well together, she observed. He had been having a portrait drawn by her, and, to Mrs. Maggs's joy, they had gone to *matinées* together, for which Mr. Moulton got free tickets. Of course, there could be nothing in it; Miss Penn-Porter was old enough to be his mother, and Mr. Moulton had expressed the views of a congenital celibate. Still, it was nice to see them together, enjoying themselves, he in his elegant waisted overcoat, that reminded her of a bumble-bee, and Miss Penn-Porter, with her pretty red cheeks and soft brown eyes, always so tastefully dressed, with a daring but perfect color scheme, as became an artist.

"And not a wrinkle—at quite fifty—not a wrinkle!" observed Mrs. Maggs, emphatically, to her sister-in-law. "Which just shows there's something in them pots of cream and rollers and massage cloths that litter up her dressing-table. Now, if you could have children by looking young—but you can't, my dear. Nature's a cruel thing, and she's more than wrinkle-deep, as that poor soul knows!"

Lying in bed, Mrs. Maggs had been an open exchange of gossip. She enjoyed a good gossip, being kindly by nature, and therefore engrossed by everybody else's affairs. It was to her what books and newspapers were to others. It broadened her world

and deepened her understanding of the human heart. And it never made her cruel or malicious. She liked to hear about everybody because she wanted to like everybody, and, as she often observed, "Every poor thing's ready to cry about something, if we could only find it."

Not that Mrs. Maggs luxuriated in sorrow. A blither old soul could not be found waging the daily battle over a scullery sink. She liked life, she liked labor, and enjoyed seeing her young people go out fresh in the morning and come home tired at night, ready for the comfort of their little rooms. She liked to be told of their disappointments, and loved to exclaim, "Why, God bless us, dearie, I knew it would come!" when they reported success.

She liked whisking around with a carpet brush until Felix, with tail erect, walked out of the house in indignation, and she liked, most of all, that ten o'clock hour, when the whole routine was over, and she could sit snugly in the basement kitchen, with the teapot on the hob, some darning on her lap, and one of the young ladies calling in for a little gossip before bed.

It seemed as if, on her mantelpiece, her whole life was expressed. At one end was a portrait of Jim, her late husband; at the other end, of Jim, her son. In the middle was a round, tin alarm clock, which she set to wake her at six-thirty each morning. "For I believe in bein' early," she always said. The only ornament was a glass sphere. In it was a colored model of a ship. When you turned it over, and placed it upright again, a sediment, settling through the water, made it look as if the ship were sailing through a heavy snow storm.

"My uncle brought me that when I was a little girl. He was a sailor, and told me such stories about the storms he went through, that, whenever I turned that thing upside down, it used to make me cry, so real it was. And sure enough he was drowned in a storm, somewhere India-way."

Yes, Mrs. Maggs was happy again. Diana, entering, heard her singing below. It was always the same song, "Hushaby, my little piccaninny," sung in a flat tone that gave it a queer melancholy in Diana's ears.

"How are you this evening, Mrs. Maggs?" asked Diana, going downstairs for a few moments before dressing.

"Come in, dearie! Oh, I'm taking it easy at first, but I'm better, bless you all! And I've had my tonic just come. Look!" cried Mrs. Maggs.

She drew a letter out of her pocket and flourished it triumphantly.

"From Jim, bless 'im—he never forgets me!" she cried.

"I hope he's well and happy," said Diana.

"Oh yes, Miss Delaney. He's one of them contented lads, 'e is. Not that he wouldn't like to be 'ome. He was always a 'ome boy. But you're early to-night, dearie?"

Diana's flushed face and bright eyes made Mrs. Maggs look acutely.

"Now 'as that poor blind gentleman been saying something to you?"

Diana laughed and put an arm around her landlady.

"You're an incurably romantic old lady. All

that's happened is that Sir Lionel's asked me to go to the opera."

"The opera!" exclaimed Mrs. Maggs, treading on Felix in her excitement, who screamed in anger.

"Drat the cat! He's always under my feet. The opera! There now! Music, they always go to hear music, dearie, when they begin to feel like that. It helps, somehow. Jim used to take me to hear the band in the park every Saturday night. It always made us feel I don't know how."

"Mrs. Maggs—I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you're all wrong," said Diana. "There's nothing between us—besides, he's not the young man."

The old lady sat down in her chair and looked up at Diana, who was straightening her hair before the mirror.

"You see—there's some one else I do care about," confessed Diana.

"Well—I never!—and you've never said a word about 'im, dearie," cried Mrs. Maggs. "I did hear there was a young gentleman called for you in a car one morning, and Miss Penn-Porter came down here so flustered that it might have been her young man. And so there's some one with the sense to want you, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know that—yet!" laughed Diana. "And p'r'aps I shall never see him again. He leaves to-morrow for America."

Mrs. Maggs smoothed her dress and looked serious.

"That sounds bad, dearie. Has he promised he'll send for you? I've known dozens of girls jilted like that. They've gone to America, or Canada, or Australia, and as soon as they're settled they'll

send, so they say. But they don't. A girl in the eye's worth ten over the water—that's what happens. Well, I'm sorry, dearie. Just look around, don't waste any time on 'im."

Diana laughed at the old lady and gave her a hug.

"I must go and change. You're wrong this time. David's coming back at the end of January. He's gone on a business trip," she said, going to the door.

"David—so that's his name is it?" cried Mrs. Maggs, delightedly.

"There!—I've let you know his name, Mrs. Maggs, but you mustn't talk about it. There's nothing at all, really, between us, so please don't talk!"

The landlady stood up as if to answer a serious charge.

"Miss Delaney, you know me. You know I don't gossip, dearie. I detest clacking old women. I'm secret as the grave—more, seeing as 'ow they dig 'em up these days, suspicious-like. But I won't say I'm not disappointed. There's that nice kind baronet—and 'im blind too, poor boy. How nice it would be for 'im to have your bright eyes. And 'e's rich, I understand."

"Mrs. Maggs, you're a mercenary old wretch!"

"P'r'aps I am, and p'r'aps I'm not. All I know is that a woman has a better chance of keeping her husband if she keeps her looks. And she's a better chance of keeping her looks if she keeps her servant. And she can't keep a servant without money. It's what they call a vicious circle, dearie. Love in a cottage is all right. I've tried it and I know, but I'll confess there's bin times when I could 'ave done

with a few more rooms to get away from 'im. And all men 'ave stomachs, dearie. I've known a good cook to keep a man fond of 'is 'ome and 'is wife. And good cooks cost money!"

"Mrs. Maggs, you're corrupting me—I'm going!" cried Diana.

"A little 'ot water, dearie?" asked the old lady. "I'll have the kettle on the boil in a minute," she said, going to the fireplace. "I'll bring it up to you."

"No you won't—you're not to climb those stairs—I'll come down for it. It's bad for your heart."

"If me 'eart's goin' to give out, it's goin' to give out. I 'ope I'm not wicked," said Mrs. Maggs, gravely, "but I'm not goin' to crawl around like a fossil. If I'm to go, I'm to go, and if I'm to stay, then I stay to work. I don't hold with cumbrances!"

Diana pointed an accusing finger at her landlady.

"You're both wicked and obstinate, Mrs. Maggs. You'll be cut off," cried Diana, as she left the room.

"Ah well, if I am, they won't find any shillings in my meter!" chuckled the old lady as she poked up the fire.

II

Diana might have been going to Court for all the commotion that filled the upper rooms of the house in George Street.

"A box!" exclaimed Cherry. "Then, my dear, you're not going to the opera to hear anything, you're going to be seen and to look haughty."

"Don't be silly, Cherry—I want to hear the opera—it's *Butterfly*! Sir Lionel says it's wonderful," cried Diana.

"You'll see butterflies—hundreds of 'em, with nothing on their shoulders and less in their heads," said Miss Penn-Porter, acidly. She had had a tiring day, chasing after a musical comedy queen who had commissioned a portrait, but didn't understand why she must sit for it.

Cherry, who had darted out of the room while Miss Penn-Porter was engaged on Diana's hair, returned with something white hanging on her arm.

"Here we are—Poiret's latest. I bought it after I'd finished my tour in *Light's Out*," said Cherry, stretching the frock before Diana's astonished eyes.

"But, Cherry—I've got an evening gown!" declared Diana.

"I don't want to be rude, darling, but I've seen it. It's probably quite hygienic, and would be approved by the Strait Spine Society, but to-night you're going to be *ravissante*, as a Belgian count told me I was one night, when he saw me home in his car. But it was he who was ravishing, and I had to stop him making a meal of me. Now just slip it on. And here's a white silk 'cami' to go with it—those blue straps of yours will show."

There was no resisting Cherry. Diana discarded her things and slipped into Cherry's.

"Oh—I feel like a fairy princess—do hold me down, somebody!" cried Diana, waving her arms in ecstasy.

"My dear—you've quite the prettiest arms I've ever seen in my life—I simply must draw them!" exclaimed Miss Penn-Porter.

"I hope somebody will be drawn by them—that's more to the point," said Cherry, critically studying her model. "Diana, if I'd legs like yours I'd make 'em carry me into the House of Lords. You're one of those lucky people who pay for undressing!"

"What she wants now is a rope of pearls!" said Miss Penn-Porter, growing more ecstatic every moment.

"I've got 'em. Father added a fresh one every birthday. Now there's a hundred, my dears," said Cherry. "I won 'em at a Theatrical Garden Party, for guessing the nearest number of peas in a pint. I'll defy anybody to detect without tasting. I'll fetch 'em."

She darted away.

"Oh!" exclaimed Diana in sudden dismay.

"Now what's the matter, my dear?" asked Miss Penn-Porter, curling the petals of a pink chrysanthemum for Diana's shoulder.

"I can't wear this dress—I've no white satin shoes!" she cried, with a fallen face.

"What size are your feet?"

"Two's," answered Diana.

"Then I've got 'em. You can thank God for giving me size two in my life-outfit," said Miss Penn-Porter, putting down the flower. She went out for them as Cherry came in.

"You know, Cherry, I shall feel an awful fraud—there's hardly anything my own!" exclaimed Diana.

"Rubbish! Your face, arms and legs are your own. These things are just to set them off. Di, you're lovely, my dear. Simperly loverly!" cried Cherry, walking round her. "I've never felt happy about Sir Lionel before!"

"Why happy?"

"Because the dear man can't see what he's missing. I know all about the blindness of virtue. Now I know the virtue of blindness. You angel!"

"Cherry, if you go on saying extravagant things like that I shall get a swollen head!"

"My dear, if I looked like that I should have a swollen lip—I shouldn't be able to keep them off. Don't look shocked, darling. If I meant all I said, I couldn't say all I meant. That's not mine, it's from *The Right Idea*."

Miss Penn-Porter entered with the shoes, and immediately behind her was Mrs. Maggs.

"There's a car come, with a——"

The sentence went unfinished, and a paralyzed Mrs. Maggs stood rooted to the threshold by a vision of beauty.

"Oh, Miss Delaney, you're a picture!" exclaimed Mrs. Maggs, when she had recovered her breath. "I've never seen anything so beautiful. What a pretty frock!—but don't get cold, dearie, there isn't much of it, is there?—but oh, it's lovely!"

Miss Penn-Porter and Cherry Carmen gave Diana a few last touches. Then Cherry produced a cloak to match, and a fan. The shoes mercifully fitted. Diana was complete and radiant.

"Did you say the car had come?" she asked.

"Bless me, you've knocked it right out of me 'ead," exclaimed Mrs. Maggs. "Yes, there's a great saloon, and a gentleman sitting in it. And there's a small boy waiting for you at the door."

"That's Tuppence, the page—I must fly. Good-by! Oh, bless you all! You are darlings!" cried

Diana, kissing them each in turn, her cheeks flushed with excitement. Then she ran down the stairs.

III

It seemed to Diana, that evening, that she had been transformed into Cinderella in all her glory. There was the vast opera-house, with its tiers of boxes and seats, its long rectangle of crimson stalls, its great stage, the brilliant lights between the intervals, the hush when they were lowered, and that soft music stirring through the dimness. When the great curtain rose the singers appeared; the orchestra, under that sensitive baton, rose and fell with those perfect voices, pleading with the exquisite music. There were the thrilling moments when the twin voices of the duettists were borne up and up on that flight of disciplined instruments. Then a storm of applause broke, as the last notes vanished, and, again, the fall of the heavy curtains, the raising of lights, and the world of fashion and beauty once more visible.

From their box Diana looked down upon the stalls, thronged with immaculate men and lovely women, who stirred with a glitter of jewels, and laughed and chatted as they fanned themselves. Here, visible, was that society of a great capital of the world, of which she had read in novels and dimly believed to exist. And in this moment of unbelievable wonder her first thought was of her mother. If only she could be here, sitting in this box, beholding this magnificence, and also, of course, the amazing good fortune of Diana, her daughter.

In the second interval some of Sir Lionel's friends

visited the box, and Diana discreetly withdrew into the background. But in his graciousness, his unceasing desire to show her every kindness, he drew her forward, miraculously sensing her absence from the conversation. And it was her opinion he sought, her fresh ecstasy he delighted in.

"Do you know, Miss Delaney—it's just as though I heard *Butterfly* for the first time. This is my seventh *Butterfly*, and I still shiver down the spine at parts of it—but now I know what's coming, and I'm ready to shiver!"

The conductor had returned, there was a ripple of applause and, persisting through it, the medley of instruments tuning up, with the oboe melancholy, and the piccolo preposterously flippant, amid the sighing violins. The lights were lowered again. Above the murmur of voices three sharp taps of a baton demanded attention. A solemn hush fell over the darkened auditorium, and the overture of the last act filled the theater with its tender *leitmotiv*.

Diana sat back in her chair. Against the vague light of the stage, cutting it sharply with his profile, was Sir Lionel's head, alert, classical. She could even detect on his face the quiet smile of pleasure. Her whole heart went out to him in her admiration of his courage, his gallantry. She loved David with a passion of self-sacrifice, she admired Sir Lionel with a passion of service to him. It was strange that two men so dissimilar could reach the very depth of her nature, one just by himself, the other by his qualities.

When the last curtain had fallen and the applauding audience had risen, recalling the artists, Sir Lionel, elated with pleasure, said to her, as they

left their box and she guided him down the stair-case—

"I say, we can't go home after a feast like that—I'm all keyed up! What about a dance, Miss Delaney?"

"A dance—to-night?" she asked.

"Certainly—this is the hour. There's Murray's, the Kit-Kat, or the Savoy——"

"Oh, I'd love to go to the Savoy," exclaimed Diana, and then fearing she had let her enthusiasm carry her away—"But perhaps you are tired, Sir Lionel?"

"Tired! Good Lord, no! I'm just like a cat, I'm less blind at midnight."

They had reached the vestibule of the theater.

"Do you see Tuppence anywhere?" he asked.

"Yes—there he is!" cried Diana, spotting the dapper little figure.

"Good—he can take us to the car straight away, without waiting our turn in this crush," said Sir Lionel, flicking open his opera hat.

"The Savoy," he said to Tuppence as the door closed on them. The page joined the chauffeur. The car threaded the quiet streets down towards the Strand.

CHAPTER XVII

I

WHEN Audrey and Arthur Wargrave had finished dinner at Claridge's they sat on in the dining-room, being in no hurry to leave.

"Shall we go on to the Grattan affair?" he asked, when the furtive waiters, looking at their table, told him they were becoming unpopular.

"We promised—so I suppose we must," answered Audrey, picking up her chatelaine and rising. "But I'd rather we'd had this last night together. And I want to talk to you."

He gave her a swift, curious glance. She had been preoccupied throughout dinner, and he felt uneasy. He had known intuitively, when he entered Caine's room, that he had interrupted a conversation on which he had intruded. He had no illusions regarding Caine, but he had always looked upon him as negligible. Would he have been jealous, he wondered, had he loved Audrey as he should? Or was it that he really felt a contempt for such an obvious schemer?

In any case he was certain Audrey would give the fellow no encouragement. All the same, he was curious to know just what they had been talking about to create an atmosphere so antagonistic as he had sensed it. Despite her deliberate attempt to be vivacious, something had shadowed Audrey's customary cheerfulness throughout dinner. Now she

showed a distaste for going on to the dance, and dancing to Audrey was almost a mania.

"Let's sit in the lounge, we needn't arrive until ten," she said, as they left the dining-room. Without waiting for his assent, she sought out a quiet corner. Wargrave followed and sat himself down at her side.

"You want to talk to me—about what, Audrey? You've had something on your mind all night. What is it?" he asked.

She put a hand on his, and looked straight into his eyes.

"Arthur—it's something Ronnie said, just before you came in——"

"I knew there was something," he said, quietly. "Well?"

"I'm not telling you because Ronnie said it. It has no importance as coming from him. He had his own motive for saying it. It's only important because it's what I've known myself. I've been dishonest with you, Arthur."

He felt the pressure of her hand on his, and saw she was making a great effort to face things.

"Audrey, my dear—I know all you're going to say. But you shan't say anything about dishonesty. You've been loyal throughout. You must have seen through me again and again. You're going to tell me our engagement's a ghastly mistake?"

"Yes," she said, with a gasp. "That's it. It is, isn't it, Arthur? We needn't pretend to each other any more?"

He did not answer at once, and she was surprised to see his face quiver with repressed emotion.

"Arthur—if I am hurting you—forgive me.

I've worse to tell you yet," she said, with a quick desperation. "I'm in love!"

She saw him start at that, and without giving him time to make any remark, she continued—

"I want to be absolutely honest. I felt unhappy about our engagement before this happened to me, before I went to America——"

"Then it was there—in these last four months?" he asked.

"Yes, but that's not what I must make clear. I've not ceased to care for you because I care for some one else. I had ceased long before I saw him. I felt a tremendous disappointment. Our love has not been the real thing at all."

"Audrey—I can't let you take any blame for that. I've failed miserably to make you love me," he said.

"We won't argue about that, Arthur—you can't make people love you—at least you can't make a nature like mine. We let our engagement overtake us out of sheer kindness. We knew it pleased everybody around us, and we neither of us had the courage to be frank with each other. Don't you see that?"

"I see it's been a mistake—but it's mostly mine," said Wargrave. "You haven't heard my confession. I've tried hard to make myself believe it would all come right in the end. You've seen through that. You know I am fond of you, my dear, I admire you—and I've tried to think it might be love. Well, you've found out. I know now it isn't."

She smiled gently at him and then looked away. He watched an old lady and gentleman walk down the lounge, heard a page calling a name, and

thought how singularly unreal the whole business of life was. It baffled him. They might have been married. Now they would not be married. Twenty years hence this conversation would have significance, viewed from the diverse channels of their two lives.

They sat there in silence a few moments. Presently he asked a question.

"You are in love, Audrey—beyond question?"

"Beyond all question," she answered, earnestly. "That's why I've been so impossible to you these last few days."

"Oh, my dear, please," said Wargrave, deprecatingly.

"Yes—I have been, Arthur. I've been angry with you—because you couldn't make a better pretense of what you aren't."

"Is that why Caine spoke—he saw it so clearly?"

"Yes—I suppose so. He's clever, Arthur."

"Very," agreed Wargrave, grimly.

"And yet an utter fool—he hadn't the smallest idea of the truth—that I've been in love for three months."

"He's in America—an American?" asked Wargrave.

"No, English—at the Embassy in Washington. We met at lunch there."

"But you'd known him?" asked Wargrave.

"No—it was like that!"

She passed her hand quickly across her eyes, and he marveled how they shone with her confession.

"Isn't it strange?" she asked, in a frightened voice.

"No—I know it can be like that," he said. "There's no reason in love—it happens."

"I've not made you very unhappy, Arthur?" she said, gently.

"No, my dear. We have lost nothing but a misunderstanding. I've had a dreadful time these last four months also. I knew I was a sham, that I was deceiving you—but I was afraid of hurting you. I'm a weak creature, Audrey. We persuade ourselves we're kind-hearted, when really we're cowardly hypocrites. My dear, I hope you're going to be happy."

She made no response for a time, and she kept her head bent. When she raised it her eyes were swimming in tears.

"Audrey, my dear—what is it—tell me?" he asked, kindly.

"Arthur—I don't know yet—whether I'll be happy. We haven't spoken of that at all!"

"You mean——" began Wargrave, incredulously, and then, realizing the whole situation, "Good God! You mean you've neither of you spoken about it?"

"Yes," said Audrey, chokingly. "How could we, Arthur? As things were we had no right. He saw that. We just met, and met, and met. And I knew we couldn't keep meeting like that."

"And then?"

"Why, nothing, Arthur," she said. "I just left Washington."

The piteously simple reply smote him. He was nearer to loving her at that moment than he had ever been. He looked around the lounge. Their corner was deserted, and with a comforting tenderness he slipped his arm around her.

"Audrey—this can't go on. He must know. Didn't you give him any hope?"

She struggled vainly to speak, and he held her in silence. He had so much to tell her himself, but this was no place and time. Then, calmer, she gave him a queer little smile.

"What a funny dinner party!" she said, irrelevantly, and then—"He's coming home on leave in April. I said we might meet then, if I was not abroad."

"I shall tell him you'll not be abroad," said Wargrave.

"Oh, no—please, you must not do that!" she cried. "And you don't know who he is," she added, with a forced smile.

"The Embassy staff in Washington isn't a large one," he answered, "if you won't tell me, my dear."

They laughed at his little threat. Then they sat without speaking awhile, watching the visitors in the lounge, but not seeing them since they were inwardly occupied with this new situation.

"Andrey," he said presently, "we'd better announce that our engagement is off at once. I'll come back and see Sir John to-night. It will hurt him, I fear."

But she did not want the announcement made, not until his return from America. Wargrave was in favor of it. That poor man in Washington should not be left in suspense. Finally, he discovered the reason of her reluctance.

"You see, Arthur, they might say all sorts of things while you're away, and you would not be here to answer them," she explained.

"You loyal creature! They can say anything—

the whole blame's mine. If that's your reason we'll make the announcement at once."

He could not persuade her, however, and finally agreed that the news of their broken engagement should be left until his return from America.

"Now what about the Grattans' dance—shall we go?" he asked. It was nearly ten o'clock.

"Yes—we'll be less miserable if we can't think," she said, and then, with a sparkle that he had known of old, "All the people seeing us dancing together will say what a united couple we are!"

"Which will be perfectly true, Audrey," he said.

"Perfectly true," she answered, smiling back at him.

II

Half an hour later they were dancing amid the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Grattan, who had brought on a large party from Carlton House Terrace, which they dominated in six months, with the aid of Fort Worth oil wells. Mr. Grattan had begun life as a professor of chemistry in a Texas university. He was now ending it in a trance, induced by a wife whose ambition took him to bed every morning at 2 A.M. too tired to listen to his errors.

Every one liked the Grattans. Their madness took the form of endless hospitality, enjoyed by that section of society which trades its birthright for a bottle of Heidsieck. Mr. Grattan wondered and blundered right through the Valley of Birth. Once, when a friend was boasting of having made a machine that sent a bullet through a two-inch steel plate, Mr. Grattan chuckled and said, "Aw, that's

punk! My wife's gone right through the British aristocracy with a champagne cork!"

To-night Mrs. Grattan had judiciously mixed Birth with Bohemia. The Stage, the Church and Journalism, terms now synonymous with Society, revolved to rhythms of Semitic-Negroid origin; to those staccato rhythms which have made the English public better acquainted with the names of America's Southern States. Almost the first person Arthur Wargrave saw, on entering the private ballroom, was his secretary, David Hameldon.

"Who's the girl he's with?" asked Audrey.

Wargrave looked for him in the passing couples, and having sighted him—

"Oh—that's his number one—the Fillison girl," he said. "Meriel Fillison, who's going to play lead on tour with *The Right Idea*."

"Number one—does David have to number his fancies?"

"For safety sake, yes!" laughed Wargrave. "But I'm rather alarmed about the Fillison girl."

"Why—don't you approve of her?"

"*Your eyes are blew-oooh—blew-oooh—blew-oooh,*" sang a man to the wail of the saxophone, "*An' without you, honey, ah don't know what ah'd do-oooh,*" came an adenoidal supplement from another member of the orchestra. Crash! went the cymbals.

Wargrave waited until the din subsided.

"I'm suspicious of any one who holds David for more than a month. He's not been himself of late. The other day he actually defended marriage. It's been interfering with his work, too."

"She's very pretty, Arthur," said Audrey, as they passed them again. "Is she a good actress?"

"No—she's a very bad one."

"Then why do you give her a leading part?"

Arthur Wargrave laughed and looked down at his partner.

"Audrey, my dear, you never would believe I'm a subtle person. Audiences don't want clever actresses, they want them pretty or vicious. That's why I have Maisie Mannering playing lead in town, and Meriel Fillison on tour."

"Then is Maisie Mannering vicious?"

"No. She's clever enough to hide her lack of talent by throwing herself about the stage, and she's a trick of looking doped. It gives her followers a great thrill. They love people who seem to live desperately."

At eleven o'clock Wargrave claimed Audrey for a final dance.

"I've ordered David home—we'll be up all night. And I must go back with you and see Sir John. Audrey, I'm dreading that scene."

"He'll be a dear, Arthur."

"That's just why," replied Wargrave, despondently.

CHAPTER XVIII

I

SIR LIONEL'S car, entering the narrow neck of Savoy Court, found itself in a queue waiting to draw up to the hotel entrance.

"Oh, I'd forgotten—the Prince has been speaking at a dinner here to-night. That explains the crush," said Sir Lionel, when Diana had told him why they were at a standstill. "Do you mind?—it would save time if we got out and walked to the door."

Diana agreed, and they stepped on to the pavement. She took Sir Lionel's arm and led him towards the door, which discharged a ceaseless stream of men and women.

"There's a revolving door here," warned Diana. "Will you go first?"

"Yes, I know it—I'm an expert with these doors—you watch me," said Sir Lionel, blithely. He moved to it and listened to its beat as it swung round. Then he stepped boldly into a vacant section.

But at that moment, when Diana should have watched, something happened, so breath-taking that she forgot even her care of Sir Lionel or to witness his prowess. He passed in, while she stood rooted to the spot. The door, swinging round, had discharged a tall, slim girl, fair-haired like herself, in an exquisite evening wrap, tipped with ermine. Diana noticed her momentarily because of her beauty, but the next second, following her out, came

one whose face brought a cry to her lips. It was David.

He did not see her or hear her cry, engrossed with his fair companion. The commissionaire opened the door of a waiting taxi. The girl passed into it. Diana had just time to recover from her surprise, to notice the splendid cut of David's clothes, the air of elegant manhood that enveloped him, from his glossy dark head to his glossy patent shoes, when he disappeared into the taxi. She had a last glimpse of his face, smiling and attentive to his companion, as the door closed on him and the taxi-cab moved on in the long queue.

The quickness of it, the sudden realization that this was David who had passed, escorting a beautiful young woman with whom he was acquainted, left her standing as one in a trance. Then the knowledge that Sir Lionel would be waiting for her on the other side of the door recalled her to action, and she stepped forward.

"Oh—I wondered if you'd gone round and out again!" laughed Sir Lionel, as she went up to him.

Diana could not answer. The bright open vestibule was filled with men and women, cloaked and hatted, talking in groups as they waited for their cars.

"Here! Page!" called Sir Lionel. A boy flew up. "Take this lady to the cloakroom, wait for her, and bring her to the lounge. I'll join you there," he said, turning to Diana, "the ballroom's below."

In the cloakroom Diana had time to collect herself. Why should she be so put out by this chance meeting with David? There was no reason why he

should not have been here—with another girl even. He must know lots of nice girls, old friends, whom he had known longer than her. She was obviously a nice girl, a glance showed that. But it was a little odd that David, so terribly rushed this last night, should have found time to come to the hotel. When she had suggested spending their last evening together, he was full of regrets. It was quite impossible because he was terribly behind with his work, and Wargrave would be calling for him every minute. She had seen the reason of it at once.

And yet, somehow, he had contrived to find time to come here with a friend—a very pretty girl. What would he have said had he seen her as he went? There would be some quite simple explanation, of course.

Diana powdered her nose and looked at herself critically in the long mirror. Yes, she, too, was pretty. Cherry's gown was a great success. Sir Lionel had told her that he had never before been visited in his box by so many friends—and she was glad he couldn't see her color up at the compliment. David would have liked her in this gown, too—if only he had seen her!

Suddenly she had a quick feeling of relief in her anxiety. Yes, that was it. His friend was an actress, obviously. Perhaps he had had to see her on business, and had found her here, after the theater. Perhaps——

He had looked splendid in his dress clothes. Full evening dress, too, with tail coat, white waistcoat and bow. In which case, he must have been dining or dancing with the lady—he would not dress like that for home or his club. Also a lady dining or

dancing here could obviously not be acting on the stage at the same time. Oh, dear, it was puzzling, thought Diana, as she left the cloakroom and followed the page. Silly, jealous little fool, that's what she was. David had a perfect right to do what he liked, to go out with whom he liked. Yes, he had. But, this last night of his in England, if it were free . . .

She was still in a ferment of speculation when she joined Sir Lionel. He chattered brightly as he led her down to the ballroom. He insisted on her drinking champagne-cup, and then, his order given, he took her on to the floor. The room was hot, thronged, with the soft slur of feet on the sprung floor. Old men, young women, women of no age at all, women like boys, hipless, breastless and clipped; young men feline as women, chestless, shoulderless; old men with heavy buttocks and ample women with fat backs; women who couldn't grow old and women who wouldn't; hard girls with tired faces and tough men with livery eyes; bright girls with darting glances and hungry youths of consuming ardor; the cheerful father and the anxious mother; the party of six that wouldn't separate and the party of eight that wouldn't mix; round and round they went, in that syncopated camel-lurch born of a Jewish composer, begotten of a negro slave.

Sir Lionel danced lightly and with perfect confidence. He gave himself completely to Diana, letting her direct him through the maze. She discovered to her joy that he was her natural partner, size and step and sense of rhythm merging unconsciously.

"I say, you're a topping dancer, Miss Delaney.

They didn't prevent your learning to dance at the vicarage!" he laughed.

"I've never learned," confessed Diana, "but my brother-in-law is jazz-mad. We used to dance at his house. I don't know any of the very modern dances."

"That doesn't matter—they're like women's frocks—by the time you've got 'em, they're out of fashion. This nigger-shuffle will stay because the old boys find it easy. It's really a gout-walk."

He was known there. On every hand, as they went round, came cries of greeting from men and women. "Hello, Leo!" "Cheerio, Lionel." "Leo—by Jove!" "Sir Lionel—how d'you do?" "Why, Sir Lionel!" He was popular, and no wonder, thought Diana, with his looks, his smile and his unconquerable good cheer.

He introduced her to his friends and presently she found herself dancing with a Captain McDonagh.

"Isn't Leo a wonder? Do you know, Miss Delaney, I feel chokey every time I see him," said McDonagh as they danced.

"Oh, do you? That's just how I feel—and he would hate it!" answered Diana.

"I know. You see, I've more reason than any one else to feel it—I'm the cause."

"The cause? What do you mean?" asked Diana, looking at him curiously. His face was high above hers, he was six feet two, a country-faced, pheasant-shooting fellow, clean as the winds that freshened his cheeks. But his eyes gave a strangely contradictory melancholy to his cheerful face. It

was as if one had found Grey's "Elegy" in a book of sporting prints.

"I'm the carcass he saved at the cost of his sight," said Captain McDonagh, a little bitterly. "God! if I could give him my eyes!"

Diana did not speak for a few moments. She felt he would tell her more if she waited. This was the story she was curious to know. Sir Lionel had never referred to the manner in which he was blinded.

"You mustn't worry, Captain McDonagh—I work with him, and he's tremendously happy," said Diana at last.

He watched her face earnestly.

"Really? You mean it's not simply—pluck?"

"Pluck—bringing happiness. He lives now, I think, by the sixth sense."

"And what's that, Miss Delaney?"

"I'd call it sensibility," she said.

"That's too deep for me—but I've an idea what you mean. He's a new set of values for things?"

"Yes—something like that," answered Diana.

"You see, I can observe him. I'm Lady Glent's secretary, and I read and do things for Sir Lionel. You mustn't think he's unhappy—you're hurting yourself needlessly."

She felt him hold her a little tighter, with a sympathetic gesture of gratitude.

"I say, you're a very understanding person, Miss Delaney. I'm glad he's got you," he said.

The band stopped. He found two seats in a corner.

"If it wouldn't bore you—let's talk here," he said. "You can tell me such a lot I want to learn

—from the inside. I suppose you know everything?"

"Everything?" asked Diana.

He looked at her with candid eyes, and she saw he asked for confidence.

"At Cadogan Square—you must have seen?" he said.

"Oh, that!—yes," answered Diana, slowly.

There was a pause. They had only met a few minutes ago, and now they were advancing towards ground that was sacred to them both.

"I feel I can talk to you, Miss Delaney. I don't know why. And I must talk about it. You can tell me all I want to learn. You see—his blindness is bad enough—he lost his sight for me. But the other thing tortures me even more—I'm to blame for Lady Glent too."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Diana, kindly. "It's a consequence that just followed."

"Is she—very troublesome? I saw her once—it was terrible. I've a feeling there's a battle going on in that house. I'm Leo's best friend—but the old boy doesn't breathe a word—except about the legend of her being too unwell to come down. Miss Delaney, you don't think I'm pumping you? But you can relieve my mind. I want to know. Can we do anything?"

"Nothing," said Diana, quietly, not able to prevaricate with the pain in his eyes. "Nothing more than is being done. There's seldom a cure for *that*. There are homes, of course, but Sir Lionel wouldn't tolerate the thought. I feel he's right. He has less anxiety as long as he knows everything. He loves her, Captain McDonagh."

"My God, yes!" cried her companion, and was silent awhile.

Diana was the first to speak again. She saw Sir Lionel had found another partner, who was piloting him through the dance just begun.

"You haven't told me just how he was blinded, Captain McDonagh—if you feel you could tell me?" she said.

"Certainly. It happened just south of Arras, in that terrible March offensive, in the last year of the war. I'd been cut off with half a dozen of my men, and didn't know until we were reduced to two. Then my last man went. Leo led a bombing party out to bring me in. They got to me, with half of them wiped out, and I turned back with them. Eight of those poor lads fell on the way, and only Leo and myself were left. I noticed him, then, blundering about, and suddenly he said, 'Jack—I can't see for blood!' He'd been wounded somewhere in the back of his head, but there was no blood on his face. I led him in without having time to think it queer—for his eyes were as clear as mine. But there he was, blundering about, saying, 'It's funny, but I can't see a thing!' We got him to the doctors there, and they were puzzled and sent him to the base hospital. I didn't see him for three weeks."

McDonagh paused a moment.

"And then, Miss Delaney, I knew old Leo would never see me again—he was blind. They sent him home, of course. They tried everybody, but it was hopeless. The bullet had fractured some bone in the head and had damaged the optic nerve. If he hadn't come out for me that day he'd have his sight now. That's the story he won't tell you."

Diana said nothing, since nothing worthy seemed possible. Then, after a silence between them, a thought came to her.

"Captain McDonagh—you mustn't let it worry you. Sir Lionel's a perfectly happy man," she said.

"You think so?" he asked, almost desperately "or is it just the belief created by his pluck? He must have his bad moments."

"Then they're only moments, of that I'm sure," said Diana, firmly.

Captain McDonagh gave her a sad, slow smile.

"Jove—I wish I could think so! You see, Miss Delaney, you haven't heard the end of my story yet—his blindness was the first blow."

"The first?" echoed Diana. "But there couldn't be anything worse after that?"

"Leo thought so—p'r'aps it was. He'd given his heart to a girl who funk'd a blind man for the rest of her life," explained McDonagh, bitterness in his voice.

"You mean she broke her word—because of his blindness?"

"That's the brutal truth of it—he offered to release her, of course, and she took it."

"That hurt him—dreadfully?" faltered Diana.

"He showed nothing, but he never does. You know that. It must have shaken him. He was crazy about her."

McDonagh cleared his throat, and, suddenly, with a desperate revolt against old memories, he said:

"Shall we dance, Miss Delaney?"

But Diana put a detaining hand on his arm. She must know the whole story now, she felt. It was

going to be harder still to watch Sir Lionel's daily life, but she must know clearly what his secret battle was.

"I'm sorry if this talk hurts you. Please don't think me too inquisitive," she said, "but I want to help; oh, I do want to help if I can. What you tell me may save me from blunders that might hurt him. He is still in love with her?"

"I hope not—I think he's dismissed her from his mind," replied McDonagh. "We never liked her. She was always a selfish, vain creature. Lady Glent, of course, hated the idea of his marrying an actress. I'm certain she never cared tuppence about Leo—it was his position."

"An actress? Famous and beautiful?"

"No!" said McDonagh, emphatically. "Neither, and thank God the years haven't been kind to her either. I saw her here to-night with Hameldon."

Diana caught her breath.

"Hameldon?" she said, smothering a cry.

"Yes—you know him? David Hameldon, Arthur Wargrave's secretary. He's always around with some of those women. This Fillison woman seems his latest fancy."

Diana gripped her fan. It seemed as if horses were galloping over her, as if she were going down and down in that nightmare abyss of stupefaction. But she heard herself ask, with incredible calmness—

"Fillison—Meriel Fillison?"

"Yes," answered McDonagh, and then, noticing her strained face and tired, frightened eyes, "I say, you mustn't let this worry you too much—but you did ask me."

"Oh yes—thank you, I had to know. Shall we dance now—I——" began Diana, rising.

He looked again at her, anxious. She had changed color.

"You're ill—I'm a brute. Please sit down. I'll fetch you something," he cried in a sudden alarm.

But Diana stood up, and placed her arm through his.

"No—let us dance. It's nothing at all," she said, firmly.

He made no reply, seeing her determination, and led her to the floor.

Happily it was almost the end of the dance. Somehow she talked to him for a time after the dance was over.

"I think I should go to Sir Lionel now—he may want me," she said at last.

McDonagh escorted her across the room towards his friend.

Before he left her he said, apologetically—

"I'm feeling guilty of having upset you, Miss Delaney. If Sir Lionel learns the reason he'll deprive me of the pleasure of seeing you again."

Diana forced a smile to her dry lips.

"Then he shall never know," she replied, leaving him.

Diana danced once more with Sir Lionel. After that she knew she could not go on.

"I'm so sorry, but I'm feeling frightfully tired," she said.

"Of course you are!" he cried. "And I'm a blockhead not to have realized. We'll go now—it's well past midnight. I say, I am sorry!"

He was solicitous all the way home, with a kind-

ness that, to Diana, in her distraught mood, was heart-breaking. Her brain was racing with belief and disbelief, fear, anger and misery. Somehow she contrived to answer Sir Lionel, and, for his part, he attributed her listless responses to the fatigue his conduct had induced. His last words, as she got out of the car at George Street, were apologetic.

"Please forgive me, Miss Delaney. I'm just like a silly boy out at a party—I forget all about other people and keep them up all night!"

"There's nothing to forgive—it's been a wonderful night, Sir Lionel. Thank you so much!" she said, marveling at this Diana Delaney who had risen up to do the graces for a poor bewildered creature on the verge of tears.

The car moved on. Diana let herself in quietly and mounted the stairs. At Cherry's door she paused a moment. If only she could talk to her, tell Cherry what had happened to her. And Cherry knew something of Meriel Fillison, whom she was to understudy in the lead of *The Right Idea*.

But knowing it was selfish to wake Cherry in order to pour her despair into her ears, Diana did not knock, and passed into her own room. Cinderella had come home again.

She began to undress, scarcely knowing what she took off, and then, unable to restrain her emotion any longer, she flung herself on the bed and buried her face in the pillow.

II

Ghosts have a dread of daylight, and the fears which haunt the mind by night are often dispelled by

the cheer of day. Thus it was that Diana, rising and dressing on the morning after her meeting with McDonagh, began to realize that she had been quite ridiculous. It was a blessing that Cherry was in bed when she had passed her room the previous night, because the robust Cherry would only have laughed at her for being such an idiot. Even if David had been dining with an actress, and that was by no means certain, there was nothing unloyal to herself in the fact. Moreover, David, as a dramatist's secretary, was certain to know many actresses, and it would not always be possible for him to show any preference—he had to consider Mr. Wargrave, who might be interested in some person professionally.

As for Meriel Fillison being his "latest fancy," men always talked flippantly about other men's liking for women. She had heard her brother Stephen and Jack Westcotte make remarks in the same vein. No, she had been a little fool to build up such a nightmare on flimsy fancies. At the worst, if David had made an arrangement to take Miss Fillison out to dinner, he had perhaps refrained from saying so in order not to hurt her feelings.

At breakfast, therefore, with a pale wintry sunlight struggling into her bedroom, Diana felt more cheerful, and had decided not to inform Cherry, or any other person, of the miserable end of the evening. So when Miss Penn-Porter, in a dressing-gown, with her head hidden in a mob-cap, came in to hear the chronicle of the evening, Diana drew an unclouded picture of gaiety. A few minutes later Cherry entered, very flushed.

"I've just had a little argument with a sausage in my frying-pan—it wouldn't leave the bottom, it was

so burnt, and all because I heard you two girls jabbering away up here, and I flew round, putting something on to come and hear the marvelous history. Well?" she demanded.

"My dear—they went on to the Savoy and danced!" exclaimed Miss Penn-Porter.

Cherry looked critically at Diana, who was careful to keep her back to the window.

"What time did you get home?" she asked.

"Nearly one o'clock!" answered Diana. "And I couldn't sleep for excitement when I got home."

Then Diana had to describe the evening, with much detail. She thought it safe also to tell them what she had learned from Captain McDonagh about Sir Lionel.

"My heavens! Meriel Fillison! He was engaged to her!" exclaimed Cherry, sitting on the bed. In her surprise she let her slippers fall off, revealing two small white feet that she regarded contemplatively. "That's the girl I'm going to understudy. And she could have married a baronet!"

"Miss Carmen!" said Miss Penn-Porter, slightly shocked. "You wouldn't marry a man merely because he was a baronet?"

"Merely, my dear, merely?" retorted Cherry. "Why, if he had no eyes and no legs and no hair and no brains, I'd find him irresistible—let alone a perfect dear like Sir Lionel!"

"You don't mean it, Cherry!" said Diana, also shocked.

"My dear old things, you just don't know me. I'm tittle mad. I love to mouth them—and so do most people. You can halve the tips and get double

the service. Now just think what dear old Mrs. Maggs would do for Her Ladyship!"

"She'd put your rent up, and be quite right too," said Miss Penn-Porter, severely.

"Well, I don't mind confessing I belong to the great snobocracy," cried Cherry, valiantly standing by her assertion, "though it doesn't go with a taste for fish and chips."

"And burnt sausages," added Diana, laughing.

CHAPTER XIX

I

THE approach of Christmas filled Mrs. Delaney with hope. From time to time she had conveyed to her husband the news of Diana's work and life in London. He had made little comment, and not once had he given her a message to convey to his daughter. But Mrs. Delaney never lost hope, and in the face of his apparent indifference she talked of Diana, read extracts from Diana's letters, and encouraged Stephen and the two girls to discuss their sister just as though she had left home solely to pursue a business career.

The news of the coming journey to Nice, in the New Year, filled Joan and Winifred with envy.

"It just shows what bosh it is about the wicked not prospering," said Joan, spiritedly, to her sister in their bedroom one morning.

"Good heavens, you're not calling Diana wicked, are you?" cried Winifred, the elder by two years and in her last year at the High School.

"Dad thinks she is, anyhow—it's mortal sin to be out after ten in this family. I say, Winnie, wouldn't it be a joke if she married that Sir Lionel—though he is blind. I guess he's potty on her!"

Winifred, in the act of brushing her hair, stopped and turned to look at her sister.

"Joan—you get slangier and slangier. 'I guess,' 'potty'—wherever did you pick up those phrases?"

"They're not phrases—they're words. You'll grow into a prim old governess if you're not careful. You know quite well what I mean when I say he seems potty on her. And he is, isn't he?" persisted Joan.

"You ask me a question and then answer it. P'r'aps he is and p'r'aps he's not. You can't really tell from Di's letters," answered Winifred, "and I don't suppose she'll tell us much when she comes home."

Joan pulled on her stockings, and regarded her legs in a day-dream.

"Just fancy going to Nice, and living in a villa, and being made love to by a baronet, even if he is blind. It sounds like a film. Oh, Winnie, she must marry him! I'm dying to spend a winter on the Riviera!"

"Then you'll die, I expect," said the practical Winifred, searching for a hair-slide in a box on the dressing-table. "I don't expect Lady Glent's going to let her bright boy marry a penniless vicar's daughter. I can't see you as a bridesmaid at that wedding."

"You've not a spark of romance in you!" declared Joan, sixteen, and already determined on a brilliant marriage that was to bring her a handsome husband, a limousine, and two sons and one daughter. "The youngest sister of Lady Diana Glent—it sounds lovely!"

"That just shows how little you know of society. She wouldn't be Lady Diana Glent. She'd be Lady Glent—only peers' daughters take their Christian names," said Winifred, not a little proud of her knowledge of life.

"Lady Glent, then—the pretty young sister-in-law of Sir Lionel—I'd be that, anyhow!"

"Joan—what conceit!"

"Well, I am pretty, aren't I? A girl can't have a face these days and not know it. That's why, in a way, I think it's such a pity about Diana."

"How?" asked Winifred, fixing the slide in her brown hair.

"She's really the prettiest of the Delaney bunch—and if she's going to marry a blind man, it's really wasted."

"You talk the biggest rot I ever——"

"That's slang!" said Joan, quickly. "I wonder if father will let her come here at all. Mother's hoping, I know."

"I'm afraid poor mother's going to be disappointed. I've got an idea. Suppose at breakfast we all—you and Stephen and I—talk as if Diana were coming here for Christmas. Mother could see then how he'd take it."

"Oh, let's!" cried Joan, her eyes lighting up with anticipation. "I'll go and find Stephen. He's sure to be game. We'll ask what time the train arrives on Thursday, so as we can go and meet it."

Joan rushed out and found Stephen just emerging from the bathroom.

"No good, Joan—it'll only put his back up worse!" said her brother, unhelpfully.

"But we'll see. Dad's back can't get up any higher!" urged Joan.

"Righto! But don't say I didn't warn you," he answered, absolving himself from disaster.

Stephen proved himself a true prophet. The plot failed dismally. It was Joan who made the first

remark, intended to acquaint the Rev. Delaney with their conclusion.

"Won't Jeremy go wild with delight?" exclaimed Joan, alluding to their Irish terrier, after Stephen had "wondered" what time Diana's train would arrive on Thursday.

"I shall put Moses in her bed," said Winifred, with noble courage. Moses was the vicarage cat, so named from the repeated inquiry as to where he went when the light was out.

Mr. Delaney, spreading marmalade on his toast, gave not a sign of having heard their remarks.

"It is time you were going, Stephen," he said, pulling out his watch. "I'm sure you must have been late yesterday morning!"

"No, I wasn't, father. I think your watch is fast. Mine's——"

"It is a good fault," observed Mr. Delaney, folding his napkin, which was the sign for Grace.

The three children exchanged significant glances. Stephen gathered up his books in the hall.

"Told you!" he said, laconically, as Joan passed him. In his disgust he gave the door an extra bang. All the way to the High School he was wondering what Christmas present he could get for ten shillings—it should be something Diana could use on the Riviera. He could only think of sunshades, and doubted whether it was possible to buy them in December in England. They hadn't much of a vogue even in June!

Mr. Delaney had not left the dining-room when his wife came back into it to clear away the breakfast things. He sat by the fire, reading the newspaper. It was his custom to take it into the study

and read there. Mrs. Delaney knew he had remained on purpose to speak to her.

"Mary, you heard what the children said?" he asked, looking at her over the top of the newspaper.

Mrs. Delaney stood still, a teapot in one hand, the bread dish in another.

"Yes, I heard," she said, quietly.

"I hope you haven't led them to imagine Diana is coming here?"

"I've led them to imagine nothing. It seems to me quite a natural conclusion."

They looked at each other a moment.

"It is to me most unnatural," commented Mr. Delaney, severely.

"And to me—but not as you think, Stephen," replied Mrs. Delaney, a slight flush on her cheeks. "It's most unnatural that any child should not be allowed to visit her own home at Christmas. I suppose you'll go into the pulpit and preach Peace on Earth and Goodwill to Men——"

"Mary, how can you speak so lightly?" protested her husband.

"Lightly—do you think I feel lightly about Diana having no home to come to when all over the earth every one turns homeward? I'm wondering what our own parishioners will think when they know the poor child has to stay with a married sister, because she isn't allowed to stay in her own home, with her own mother!"

The vicar stood up, folding his newspaper with a deliberation that implied careful self-control.

"I hope my parishioners, since you drag them into it, will be more ready than you are, Mary, to credit

me with a proper motive. Diana left the house of her own accord——”

“After you had locked her out!”

“And she cannot expect to enter it except on my invitation,” said the Rev. Delaney, ignoring the interruption. “I have no wish to be unduly harsh. I had already decided that we should invite her to join us at the Christmas Day dinner.”

Mrs. Delaney’s face softened.

“That is worthy of you, Stephen,” she said, quietly.

He made no further comment, and watched her silently as she cleared the table. Then, with the newspaper under his arm, he went to his study.

Mrs. Delaney, being a wise woman, and knowing her husband thoroughly, did not press for Diana’s entire restitution. She was shrewd enough to know something that would have shocked her husband—that nine-tenths of his righteousness was based on pride. It had cost him a great effort to concede so much. She wondered now whether he would write himself to Diana or ask her to convey the invitation.

When Joan came in to lunch, she was surprised to feel her mother’s arms around her the moment she entered.

“Bless you, darling!” cried Mrs. Delaney, kissing her. “I saw what you children tried this morning.”

“Dad wasn’t biting, mum,” replied Joan. “Has he said anything?”

Mrs. Delaney picked up a letter on the hall stand, waiting to be posted.

“Look!” she cried. “It’s for Diana to spend Christmas Day here!”

"Is that all?" said Joan, disgustedly.

"All? It's a beginning. Your father wants to be kind."

Joan laid her cheek against her mother's.

"He seems to find it hurts him, mum. P'r'aps Diana's got her pride too, and won't come."

Mrs. Delaney started in alarm, and moved from her daughter's embrace.

"Oh, she must, she must! I'll write to her by the same post."

"Then she'll come," said Joan, brightly. "We'd do anything for you, mum darling!"

II

Diana accepted the invitation, written in her father's stiff style. She would have accepted even without her mother's supplication by the same post, for she bore her father no ill-will. In a way, he had been the unwitting agent of her good fortune, and, above all, she had come to see he was the unhappy victim of a rigid outlook on life which had found in his religion more discipline than cheer. Her pleasure at the receipt of this invitation arose more for her mother's sake than her own. She could now meet her daughter without seeming to be conspiring against her husband.

So Diana went to Nottingham and spent her Christmas there. She was met at the station by a dark-eyed Stephen, lankier than ever, and solemn Winifred, and Joan the tomboy. They escorted her down to the Westcotts', where Jack behaved like an ass, and persisted in referring to Her Ladyship.

Christmas Day at the vicarage was not nearly so

dreadful as Diana had expected. She was actually kissed in the hall by her father who, seeing her at the morning service, had given her a faint smile from the pulpit. Dinner was at midday, and Diana and Alice and Jack stayed on to tea and the evening meal. Diana was asked, and promised, to come in each day to see them.

"Well, he's done his best—he treated her just as if we hadn't a spare bedroom," commented Joan as she undressed that night. "Next year he'll find there is a spare room—when she's spending Christmas at the Hall."

"The where?" demanded Winifred.

"Wherever baronets and their wives live, my dear, when they go down to spend Christmas among their adoring tenantry."

"Joan, you are ridiculous! Besides, there's nothing whatever in that business! There's some one else. It isn't Sir Lionel at all!"

Joan stared, open-mouthed, looking at her sister, who had just got into bed. Suddenly she darted across the room and perched on the bedside.

"Oh—you know something! Why didn't Di tell me too! Who is it?"

Winifred did not reply for a few moments, enjoying the precedence with which Diana had invested her.

"It's some one she's met in London?" asked Joan, eagerly.

"Yes—and no!"

"What do you mean, yes and no?"

"She met him first in Goose Fair. That's why she was late that night. He brought her back and kissed her at the gate, and they've been meeting ever

since!" said Winifred, enjoying her sister's excitement. Then she told the whole story, with a color Diana might not have confirmed.

"There! You call me romantic!" cried Joan, when the story was all told. "I always knew Di was hot-stuff!"

"Joan!" cried Winifred, reproachfully. "Where do you learn such dreadfully vulgar expressions!"

"At school, of course," retorted Joan. "And you know exactly what I mean—Di's quick on the take-up. David—it's a lovely name, isn't it? David. David and Diana."

"Oh, get into bed!" cried Winifred, impatient with so much romance.

CHAPTER XX

I

LADY GLENT, having decided that she must do some shopping, in Paris, *en route* for Nice, had broken the journey for a couple of days. The servants had been sent on to the Villa Dardanelli, and only Mason, Lady Glent's maid, and Hilton, Sir Lionel's valet, had been detained in Paris. Diana, who knew Paris, having toured its sights in company with the nuns from her convent school, felt a thrill once more as she stood in the gloomy Gare du Nord.

"The same old smell, the same old noise—with the roads a little more bumpy than usual," said Sir Lionel, as they sat in a taxi on the way to the Hôtel St. James. "I've heard London, Berlin, Vienna, Milan and Rome, but this place has a higher pitch than any of them."

"What do you mean by a higher pitch, Sir Lionel?" asked Diana, learning every day something new in his sense of values.

"I go by the general noise—London's the quietest capital in Europe, Rome's the noisiest, Paris the most penetrating. London taxi-horns are in the key of D. Paris's are in A minor. Our honk-honks go in couplets, their pips-pips go in triplets.

"And the smells?"

"Miss Delaney, I positively refuse to listen to Leo on the smells of Europe. Please don't encour-

age him!" cried Lady Glent. "Thank heaven, we are going to Nice!"

"There are parts of Nice, you'll remember, my dear mother, particularly along the Promenade des Anglais, towards Californie, where——"

But Lady Glent would not allow him to continue. Sir Lionel's nose had found Grasse, where they boiled flowers in the scent factories, not above detection.

Their arrival in the Rue de Rivoli stopped Sir Lionel's threat of a lecture on Places I Have Nosed, which was famous at a certain club in Piccadilly.

Lady Glent's decision to break the journey at Paris had been made so quickly, as with most of her decisions, that Diana had had no time in which to inform her brother Gerald, studying at the Pasteur Institute, of her impending arrival. Finding herself at liberty in the early evening, she decided to seek his lodging in the Boulevard Malesherbes. Her taxi pulled up before a high block of apartments with characteristic iron balconies and green sun-shutters.

Gerald had always been her favorite brother. Three years her senior, their companionship had been closer than with any other members of the family, for Stephen had always seemed a baby in Diana's eyes, and Winifred and Joan were really schoolgirls. Gerald, too, had Diana's swift independence, though not her recurrent timidity. He was dashing, with that careless, high-spirited estimate of life which is so common to the medical student, whose youth, amid much evidence of disease, is emphasized by contrast.

Diana's admiration for his physical exuberance was increased by his attainments. He had passed

out high in his examinations, and was now taking a special course before beginning his work in London. His career had been made possible by his uncle, from whom he had taken his name and college fees, and whose favorite he had been since a child of five.

Inside the vestibule of the apartment house Diana at last found her brother's name, on the ill-written *indicateur*. "M. G. Delaney, 7^{me} Etage," she read, and entered the automatic lift at the end of the hall. It rose wheezily up the shaft, with a labor that gave Diana some anxiety. Finally, with a last sigh of utter fatigue, it halted at the seventh floor, which proved to be the top. Diana pushed open the iron gate and stepped on to the badly lit landing. There were two doors, one on the right and one on the left. She found her brother's visiting-card pinned on the left door. With a quickened heart she rang. It would be a tremendous surprise for him, if he were in.

Her anxiety was relieved by the sound of footsteps. The door opened.

"Gerald!" cried Diana, ecstatically, and then suddenly drew back in dismay.

A young woman had opened the door and stood inquiringly in the dim light of the tiny hall behind her.

"Yes?" asked the young woman in French, cautiously.

Diana looked at her. She was pretty, in a dark, Southern fashion, with heavy masses of black hair looped over her ears. Her eyes were vital and flashing, with the large soft pupil, whose light seems taken from the Mediterranean sea. In her voice, as

in the small olive face, was expressed the languor of hot days through which the lizard basks and the grapes hang in purple clusters along the coolness of the pergola.

"Does M'sieur Delaney live here?" asked Diana, speaking French.

The woman looked at her with a quiet appraisal that made Diana feel self-conscious.

"Yes—but he is not in," she said.

"When do you expect him—I am his sister."

"His sister?" repeated the woman, slowly, and again she looked at Diana, with eyes which were neither friendly nor hostile. It was the mildly curious gaze of an animal. "But he did not expect you?"

"Oh no—I happen to be passing through Paris. When do you expect him in?"

"Soon—he comes in to supper," said the woman.

There was a pause, neither speaking. She was slightly stupid, thought Diana, but perhaps she cooked well, so Gerald put up with her.

"May I wait for him? He will not be long?" asked Diana.

"Perhaps not—but I do not know for certain. He is sometimes late," replied the woman, not moving in the doorway.

"I'll wait for half an hour," said Diana, decisively, stepping forward.

The young woman let her enter without further speech. Beyond the tiny hall a room opened. Diana walked into it. It was small and comfortably furnished, with a coal fire burning in the grate. Bright flowered curtains were at the long French window, and the same pattern was in the loose cov-

ers of a couple of divan chairs and a settee. Somehow Gerald had contrived to get English solidity into his abode. There was no intrusion of the familiar spidery-legged Louis XV or Bergère furniture. It was obviously the living-room and dining-room of the apartment, for the small table was set for dinner. It was well set, with a few flowers in a vase in the center. This woman was efficient, obviously. And then Diana, examining the table, saw it was set for two.

"My brother is expecting some one?" asked Diana, indicating the two places.

"Mais oui, mademoiselle," replied the young woman, quietly.

She stood in the doorway, as if waiting for the stranger to give her some order, and in the better light Diana could see her clearly. She was much younger than she had seemed in the hall. Perhaps twenty-three or four, perhaps less, for these Southern types mature quickly. She was attractive in her dark voluptuous style, and dressed, even in her working costume, with French chic. It was characteristic that she should wear a short little skirt, black silk stockings on the prettiest pair of legs, and such high-heeled shoes that she seemed tilted on to her toes.

Diana, looking at her this time, smiled, though she scarcely knew why. The girl responded immediately, and her answering smile showed two rows of perfect white teeth. She was very beautiful, realized Diana suddenly.

"What a charming room!" she exclaimed, in tribute to its neatness. "How many rooms are there?"

"Two more—the bedroom," said the girl, point-

ing to a door on the left, "and the kitchenette. Look, mademoiselle."

She led the way into the kitchenette, which also contained the bath and a geyser. It was wonderfully clean and tidy.

"You keep it beautifully!" commented Diana, and the girl smiled with pleasure at her tribute. "Are you here all day?"

"No, mademoiselle—in the evenings."

Diana went back into the sitting-room, the girl following.

"Now, I'll see his bedroom—is it tiny?" asked Diana.

The girl opened the door on the left, and turned on the light.

It was about the size of the living-room, with a single window, and furnished with a large bed, dressing-table and wardrobe. Diana noticed the flowers placed on the dressing-table, and—she looked again, startled by what she saw. On the table were two silver-backed brushes with handles, a hand mirror, a manicure set, and several small jars and bottles—women's things obviously. Turning hastily from the dressing-table, she then saw something else that she had missed. On the twin pillows of the bed were two linen pajama cases.

For a moment Diana did not move. Some dresses hanging on the wall made no fresh impression. She knew now beyond doubt. It was stupid of her not to have known the moment she had seen this girl.

She turned to leave the room and found the girl standing passively on the threshold. Their eyes met and there was no need of words. The two places set for dinner were explained.

And then Diana, unable to adjust herself to this situation, asked a question. It seemed the only kind of question she could ask.

"You are married?" asked Diana.

The girl looked at her with slightly hostile eyes.

"Mais non! Je suis son ami!" she said, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

I'm his friend! Diana knew French, and "ami" was literally translated thus. So Gerald had found a mistress in the way of the youth of Paris. Diana could not deny Gerald's success in finding an amazingly pretty one.

She had blundered in on her brother, and she must decide quickly what her attitude was to be. As if to solve the problem for her, the girl spoke.

"We are very happy. I love him, mademoiselle," she said, simply, with her large eyes softly gazing into Diana's. "He is very clever and he works hard. I like to help him—so!"

She made a gesture, an inimitable French gesture with her pretty hands, indicating the general appearance of the living-room, so friendly and warm.

"You've made it charming!" responded Diana.

"You will leave your hat and coat in the bedroom, mademoiselle?"

The girl moved aside for Diana, who realized this meant a decision. Either she stayed or went, acquiesced or disapproved.

Diana entered the bedroom, the girl following.

"What is your name?" asked Diana.

"Mimi."

"And you live here?"

"A little," answered Mimi, with a half smile. "I work too."

"You work? How?" asked Diana.

"I am studying pharmacy—that is how we met, in a laboratory."

Then the girl was not of the working class. It explained her dress, her assured though gentle manner. She had chosen her way of life without the pressure of necessity. Diana knew she should be shocked. They were living in sin. But it was hard to look at Mimi, to hear the tone in her voice as she spoke of Gerald, and call it sin. In London, yes, she would have protested strongly. Here in Paris it seemed different. Why, Diana could not say.

Suddenly, as she took off her coat and hat, Mimi flew out of the room. She had heard a key in the lock.

Diana, remaining in the bedroom, heard a rapid conversation in the hall. She could not follow the words, and did not listen; obviously Mimi was explaining the situation. Diana resolved to make Gerald understand the revelation was no fault of Mimi's. She had forced her way into their home.

Her name, called by her brother, made her turn. He rushed across the room.

"Di! My dear kid! What on earth are you doing in Paris?"

He caught her up in his arms, kissing her joyfully in his boisterous way. He had always been her favorite. They understood each other so well.

"So you've found me here. Well?" he asked, not waiting for her to explain her presence.

She knew he referred to his liaison, and she looked at him frankly as he held her in his arms.

"I'm not saying anything. Am I my brother's keeper?" she said.

He laughed and hugged her.

"That's a neat evasion—but it'll do for me. And Mimi, you like her?"

"She is very pretty—and makes you comfortable."

"I've never been so happy in my life," he said, fervently.

"For how long?"

"Six months now."

"Will it last?" asked Diana.

"Of course!"

"But when you go home—what then?"

"We've agreed to part," he said.

"I find that difficult to understand—for her, not you," said Diana.

"You're English. No English girl could do this without becoming a moral wreck. The French girl can take an 'ami' and remain respectable. It's *l'amour*. We'll never understand that in England. The word 'love' isn't the same."

"What do you think is the difference?" asked Diana skeptically.

He laughed, in his delightful brusque way, and smoothed back the hair from her brow as he held her.

"What a catechism! *L'amour* is the ardor and poetry of youth. Love is something deeper, enduring, with less of ecstasy and more of understanding. But what on earth are we discussing this for. You'll stay supper. Come along!"

They went into the living-room. It was empty.

"Mimi!" he cried.

She came in, wearing a little lace-frilled apron, with a fork in her hand.

"I am cooking, chéri," she protested.

"I want to present you—my sister Diana, Mademoiselle Mimi Maillot, a clever chemist and a marvelous cook!" cried Gerald, putting his arm around them both.

"Mademoiselle understands?" asked Mimi of her lover. "I think I was rude when she came."

"Prudent—I quite understand," said Diana, smiling at her.

"*Tiens!* I must go—in five minutes I will be ready," said Mimi, releasing herself, and placing a butterfly kiss on Gerald's cheek. The next moment she had flitted into the kitchen.

Diana had now to explain her presence, to give news of the family at home. Gerald showed interest at once in Sir Lionel Glent.

"How long has he been blind?" he asked.

"Since the war," said Diana, giving him such details as she knew.

"He should see Leininger—he's in Paris now."

"Who's Leininger?"

"The greatest ophthalmic surgeon in the world. He's come from Vienna, to give a course of lectures here. I've a friend studying under him. He's quite unorthodox, and hundreds of men—war cases—owe their sight to him. Why doesn't Sir Lionel see him?" asked Gerald.

"They've tried all the doctors, there seems no hope, Gerald. Poor Sir Lionel seems quite reconciled to his fate."

"I should never lose hope until Leininger had failed."

His enthusiasm for the Viennese doctor would not be quenched. His friend could arrange for Sir Lionel to be seen, he was sure of that. Again and again during the evening, as they laughed and chatted, having eaten Mimi's excellent dinner and drunk her excellent coffee, Gerald returned to the subject of Leiningner and Sir Lionel.

"Gerald—why not see Sir Lionel and tell him all this? He'd take more notice of you," suggested Diana.

Gerald looked at her shrewdly and smiled.

"I will if you like—but I rather think he takes notice of you, blind as he is."

She saw what he meant and shook her head, a little embarrassed.

"Oh, there's nothing of that—please don't imagine it. He's blind—but he's kind to every one," said Diana. "No one could help liking him."

For a moment it was in her mind to tell him about David, but it was time for her to go, and, also, Mimi was present. Somehow she could not speak of her love of David before a third person.

When she went, Mimi and Gerald came to the lift. Her last sight of them was as she sank below in the wheezing iron cage, with the lovers standing in the doorway of their little apartment, smiling at her. She heard their door close, and carried the image of them, happy and loving, with her out into the cold Paris streets.

In the taxi, as she was borne along the glittering roads towards her hotel, she thought of them in that nest on the seventh floor, alone together, with all Paris shut out; Gerald with his engaging smile, Mimi with her dark, soft eyes and petite, oval face.

They would soon be lying in each other's arms in the darkness of that room, with its twin pillows and the little familiar oddments of their mingled lives. Yes, thought Diana, some people lived, they seized romance with both hands.

Then, shocked at herself, Diana blamed Paris for this looseness. Gerald had not been brought up like that. Her mother would be dismayed if she knew. As for her father—she had not finished imagining what her father would say when the taxi drew up at the Hôtel St. James.

II

Sir Lionel had not taken much persuading, and Lady Glent, who had never relinquished hope, strongly supported Gerald's suggestion. Thus it was that they delayed their sojourn in Paris for two more days in order to consult the great Leininger. The general nature of the case had been explained by Gerald Delaney, and the surgeon had expressed his willingness for a consultation.

They met him at four o'clock on a wet January afternoon. Sir Lionel was accompanied by Lady Glent and Gerald Delaney, Diana remaining in the ante-room of Dr. Leininger's apartment in the Boulevard Latour-Maubourg. Waiting there, anxious and acute to every sound in and outside the house, the consultation seemed interminable.

Dr. Leininger was a little, sallow, bald man. He had long white cuffs that fell half over his hands, and his frock-coat seemed several inches too long. But there was something in the thin face that proclaimed distinction, and when he spoke, almost re-

luctantly it seemed, with a peculiar accent, he had an impressive strength despite the odd choice of words in his zest for English.

"I meditate that an examination of exploring perhaps will show a means—yes? If the nerve is severed there is no more of restitution, lamentably. Yet should it not be so, a paralysis or an obstruction of removable possibility by surgical means, then it is felicitous, yes? I know not, m'sieur. I hope most, always, but I expect nothing for not to achieve disappointment, which is too terrible, yes?"

And then, as if the struggle with a strange tongue, which he had made a proud effort to speak, had been too much for him, he spoke fluently in a mixture of French and German. They must not hope too much. The nature of the case could only justify the faintest possibility of success, if he decided to operate. And he could not operate until he had studied the reports of the English doctors in whose charge Sir Lionel had been.

"And should you decide to operate, where and when would it be?" asked Lady Glent.

"I shall be here until April, after that, in Vienna. That is as you choose, madame."

"What is the earliest time possible, doctor?" asked Sir Lionel. "My mother will be hoping against hope until it is done."

Dr. Leininger smiled, and looked kindly from son to mother.

"As soon as I can get the reports, m'sieur, and find an occasion—shall we say two or three weeks?"

"Thank you—I'll be ready as soon as you are, doctor," answered Sir Lionel. They left the study.

The actual time of the consultation had been

twenty minutes. To Diana, in her anxiety, it had seemed interminable. She trembled when they joined her in the ante-room. Briefly Gerald told her the result, but he checked an exclamation of joy with a deep frown. He knew the cruelty of unjustified hope. Nevertheless, as they all took tea in the hotel on their return, there was an air of hopefulness that could not be suppressed. Sir Lionel detected it, and made but one reference.

"Do you know—you mustn't think me wickedly ungrateful, but I'm not sure I could bear being cured."

"Whatever do you mean, darling?" exclaimed Lady Glent.

His hand found hers and closed over it.

"You have all spoilt me so, and I like spoiling," he said, with an odd little smile that lacked nothing in sadness because of his unseeing eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

I

THEY left Paris that night, and by noon the following day they saw the blue and gold of the Riviera coast, with its villas set behind their ornamental iron railings, lifting red and green roofs over screens of palms and pines, with windows opening on to sun-flushed balconies where the mauve wistaria mingled with crimson roses. Finally, after enchanting glimpses of sun-smitten sea, pine-crested promontories, and gardens "where blaze the unimaginable flowers," the train ran into the station at Nice. In the last bright warmth of the afternoon they drove to the Villa Dardanelli.

Their entrance seemed purposely designed to withhold, for one tremendous moment of surprise, the panorama that was to greet them. They were driven along the dingy Boulevard Gambetta, and the squalid tram-noisy Rue de France, with its medley of shops. Never once was there a glimpse of the sea, of bright gardens and sunny vistas. Could this be beautiful Nice, thought Diana, smothering her disappointment.

Then the car began to mount the hill of Baumettes, and winding up its incline, they came at last to two massive iron gates surmounted by a ducal coronet. A short drive led them to a white marble portico, glass shaded. The first familiar objects they saw were Johnson, awaiting them, and the

ubiquitous Tuppence, whose smile stretched from ear to ear.

Then from a palm-laden vestibule, up a short wide staircase, through folding doors, they went into an ornate, gilt-mirrored Louis-Quinze salon. But it was not the crimson damask hangings, the somewhat rococo medley of white French marbles, golden statuettes on porphyry plinths, and the buhl cabinets, laden with ornaments, it was something beyond the flower-smothered balcony, that held Diana entranced. For she looked, across a lawn of radiant green, over the tops of feathered palms, on to a world of blue.

It was a blue she had never before beheld. A vast azure flood rose like a wall to the horizon, where the sky, touched with the gold of a westering sun, mounted to the crystalline, unfathomable heaven. The sea lay there, tranquil, a mirror catching every tint of the day's decline. And, as if to set it in a frame of earth, to east and west stretched the embracing promontories, dark against sea and sky.

To the right, now in gray as it backed the warm western reaches, lay Cap d'Antibes, with the low hills of Cannes-Eden and, more distant, the mountains of the Esterel. And then, to the left across the Bay of Angels, beyond the villa-dotted promontory of Montboron, the tongue of Cap Ferrat touched the sea fretting its base, with a lighthouse shining, like a cold white star, against the purple tide of the incoming night.

What a vista of nature's bounty lay there in that valley, with its sea to the south, its amphitheater of mountains to the north! And towards the crescent

Promenade, white-fronted with Grand Hotels, spaced with stunted palms and jeweled with lights sparkling in the falling dusk, Diana looked over the roofs of villas. They seemed to be sprouting from a bower of palms, tufted and fan-shaped, in a desperate struggle to keep their heads above a sea of green leaves.

"Well—you like it?" asked Sir Lionel, after a long pause.

"Oh—isn't it lovely? What is that building, out on the sea? It seems quite oriental."

"Oh—that must be the Jetée Promenade. They say it is an atrocity. Thank heaven, I can't see it!" answered Sir Lionel.

He could not see it. He could not see any of this beauty. To Diana his confession, brought by her own forgetfulness of his plight, winged like an arrow through her heart. Not to see this beauty, to stand in its midst and know nothing but darkness! It seemed impossible that magic so potent could not break in upon him, flooding with its light his formless world.

"This is one of the loveliest gardens in Nice they say," said Lady Glent. And for the first time Diana, caught up with the wonder of that vast panorama of sea and mountains, was aware of the garden at her feet.

"This is Paradise!" cried Diana.

"And in it, my dear young lady, crawl the foulest of human parasites," commented Sir Lionel.

"Whatever do you mean, Leo?" asked Lady Glent.

"This Riviera probably harbors more scoundrels to the square mile than any other place on earth.

Here are all the men who cannot live in their own lands, the bankrupts, the blackmailers, roués and callous adventurers. It is smeared with degenerate aristocrats, and is crowded with wastrels. The fashionable crowd which has never earned a penny, and values banknotes as bus tickets, comes here for the sun, which it seldom sees. They get up at noon, and the sun here is gone at four, when their day is just beginning. Their noon is midnight, their garden the Casino. Towards dawn, like singed moths, they go home to their places in this poisoned paradise."

"Leo, you talk like a Socialist," said Lady Glent, disapprovingly.

He laughed, and stood looking out towards the bay. The last sunlight fell warm upon his face. It was his only knowledge of it.

"My dear mother, we are parasites—not vicious ones, but parasites. I am quite aware of it. Why should we live in the sun, breathing the scents of flowers, feasting our eyes on this beauty, lounging in this warmth, with everything to give the senses pleasure? What have we done for it—why us? There are young boys working in dark mines, women bent over looms, clerks on stools in gray offices, mothers with——"

"My dear boy, you'd better be a Labor Candidate!" cried Lady Glent. "I'm dying for a cup of tea. Why isn't it ready?"

Lady Glent left the balcony.

"I have a lot of time to think, Miss Delaney," said Sir Lionel, as they stood side by side. "My mother can't understand these moods of mine. She thinks I become Socialistic. I have no illusions about schemes for making us all happy. The injustice of

life lies deeper than man's making or breaking. I am blind—you can see. Life treats us like that. But why am I talking like this? It is glorious, isn't it?" he said, turning his face seawards.

"You can say that?" asked Diana, quietly, her heart heavy at seeing his fine face lifted vainly towards the light, something unconquerable in its expression.

"Yes—one can feel beauty, don't you think? For instance, I know you are beautiful," he said, smiling at her.

She threw him a startled glance. It was the most personal thing he had ever said to her. But his face dispelled her fear and she saw his meaning.

"I think I understand, Sir Lionel. You mean beauty is in the heart, not the eye, of the beholder?" she said, deftly evading his compliment.

"Now we are getting much too profound!" he laughed.

Lady Glent's voice was heard calling them.

"Come along—you must be dying for a cup of tea," he said. "Isn't it marvelous how we English maintain our habits? There's a club along here where they play bridge from noon to midnight. Anyhow, I prefer those maniacs to the brutes who slaughter pigeons below the Casino at Monte Carlo. And I fear we're going to join the pigeons inside!"

"Inside! What do you mean?" asked Diana, leading him into the salon where Lady Glent sat, a monument to English habit, behind the silver gods of the tea-table.

"The pigeons who get plucked at the tables!" explained Sir Lionel, laughing.

II

It may have been poisoned, as Sir Lionel said, but for Diana, after a fortnight on that enchanted coast, it was still paradise. There were moments when her good fortune made her afraid of the next turn of the fickle wheel of Fate. Here she was, with almost all the advantages of the spoiled darlings of Society and with the additional advantage that she had none of their ennui. The cup of romance held to her lips found her still thirsty for its heady drink. She loved the sun, the sea, the pretty frocks of the women, the debonair style of the men, the glittering tea-rooms and ball-rooms where she danced, the bright plage where she bathed, and even the immense somber salons where—yes, it must be confessed—she gambled, even though it was on Sir Lionel's behalf.

There were moments when she positively disbelieved that there had ever existed such a person as Diana Delaney, daughter of the Vicar of St. Jerome's, Nottingham. The smile of Fortune, like the flowers in the wonderful garden of the Villa Dardanelli, expanded every day. Little Mrs. Wilfard, the twenty-two-year-old bride of a rich stock broker, who had snatched her out of a Bond Street florist's, swearing she was the brightest flower of the lot, had taken a swift fancy to Diana. And when once, in a simple burst of confidence, Diana had said she could not accompany her to a party because she lacked a certain kind of frock, the result had been a forced visit to Mrs. Wilfard's wardrobe.

Once Diana had gone to the Royal Opera House in a borrowed "property" frock that had been worn

by Cherry. Diana now went to a dinner party at a Royal villa, clad in a gown of Mrs. Wilford's.

"My dear—it's yours by propriety," she declared, when Diana tried it on. "I was always a frump in it. Now try this."

It was in vain that Diana protested she could not accept five gowns.

"Besides—I could never get used to so many," said Diana.

"You try—it's surprising how easy it comes! When I used to eat my lunch in a Lyons Corner House, and planned to keep it one-and-twopence, I never dreamed I could spend ten thousand a year. Now it's a nightmare not to spend more!"

Diana began to recall a saying of shrewd Mrs. Maggs. "Move where the money is, my dear. Then if your friends want to help you, they can. Sympathy rides a long way on a five-pound note." Dear old Mrs. Maggs! How she would love this garden and the sunshine.

Diana was meditating on her good fortune as she sat at her dressing-table. The only shadow in this sun-drenched life was Lady Glent. The poor creature had been terrible for a week, and twice there had been open battle, with Johnson, Mason and herself in alliance, to keep Lady Glent above stairs and out of Sir Lionel's hearing. She had stormed, calling Diana by names that had been gathered God knew where. Yet Diana preferred these moods to the maudlin affection she sometimes poured over her, which came with the heavier bouts. Only twice had Sir Lionel been aware of his mother's lapses. She had been missing at a luncheon party where, at all costs, he had to be spared humiliation.

"But what shall we do?" had asked Diana, when three broken tumblers in the bathroom had warned Mason that her ladyship was not going to be presentable by noon. "She will insist on going down."

"There's only one thing to do, miss—let her have all she wants, until she can't get down. Then she'll go to sleep."

"But that's terrible!" said Diana.

"So it is, miss—but it's more terrible to have her making a scene at lunch, with that poor man listening and guessing what's happening. Never again, says I!"

"It happened once?"

"Once? Again and again, miss, until I found how to stop it, by letting her go at it. It's the devil when she begins early, there's all day to plague you then."

"But where does she get the drink—you watch her?" asked Diana.

"Why, Miss, Delaney, folks as want drink'll have more tricks than a wagon-load of monkeys. I worked in a home for inebriates for two years. I've known 'em to have birthdays once a month, so as they'd get cakes sent, with bottles inside 'em. How can you prevent her? She goes out to pay calls, so she says—in a taxi, with a drink here and a drink there. It's a poor afternoon's work if she can't get a bottle on her own, which she doesn't try to bring in, because we find it sooner or later, though it isn't much good later, I tell you. And the drink's not the worst. It's that other stuff they get so easy down here. Poor soul, an' she's sweetness itself when she hasn't got the devil in her."

They had not been five days in Nice when Lady

Glent found a companion for her failing. She began to motor to Villefranche, to lunch at the villa of the Princess Wonteriki. Twice on her return Lady Glent's condition was peculiar, but one evening she did not return at all. It was Mason who, at half-past one, awakened Diana. She had sat up with Johnson, and they were now alarmed. It was decided to rouse the chauffeur and go over to Villefranche.

As Diana sat in the car with Mason she wondered if ever a stranger journey had been made. It was a lovely moonlit night, with the sea shining and gleaming like molten silver. The palm trees along the wide, hotel-bordered Promenade des Anglais stood black against the bright sky, with the dome of the Jetée Promenade like a mosque, its garishness softened by moonlight. It was half-past two when they arrived at the gate of the Villa Wonteriki, that clung to the hillside above the rectangular harbor of Villefranche, where several French battleships lay at anchor.

The villa seemed to be in total darkness. Reluctantly, wondering how she would explain her mission if Lady Glent were not there, Diana rang. There was no response. In the moonlight the luxuriant garden, with its vista of silver sea, appeared like the figment of a dream. She rang again. Then a third time there was a response. She heard some one stirring at last. When the door was opened, after much withdrawing of bolts, a man, wrapped in an overcoat, with pink pajama trousers showing below, blinked at the two women on the steps of the villa, Diana surmised he was the butler, and asked whether Lady Glent had left the villa.

"I do not know, mademoiselle," he said.

"Not know, but surely if——"

"I went to bed, leaving Madame la Princesse and Lady Glent in the salon."

"Then Lady Glent was here this evening?" asked Diana.

"Yes—I will see if she is here now."

He invited them into the hall and disappeared. A few moments later he reappeared and shuffled towards them.

"They are there—asleep," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Asleep—in the salon?" cried Diana, exchanging looks with Mason.

The butler broke into voluble French. Madame la Princesse would not have him wait up. It was often so. Of course, had he known Lady Glent was also staying, *comme-ça*, he would have telephoned—though to whom, and what should he have said? His life was difficult, was it not, and Madame la Princesse could be terrible.

"We must take Lady Glent home," said Diana.

"As you will," said the butler, complacently.

He conducted them to the salon, where he switched on the lights. They stood on the threshold, amazed. There, in two chairs just underneath a great Venetian chandelier, in the midst of a sumptuously appointed room, reclined the Princess and Lady Glent. They were both heavily sleeping, with their heads fallen inert over their chests. Each stertorously drawn breath shook them, with an inane effect. It was an incredible scene. The cause of their condition stood undisguised on the low Burmese table between them.

"Fetch the chauffeur, Mason—we can't lift her," said Diana.

When the chauffeur came in, a strong young ex-Guardsman, he lifted Lady Glent and carried her out. She was propped up against the cushions in the limousine, without once opening her eyes.

"What can I do? I can do nothing, can I? Madame la Princesse has a terrible temper," muttered the butler, helplessly contemplating the huddled-up figure of his mistress. "I shall leave her and she will be terrible in the morning. And if I wake her she will fight me. *Mon Dieu!* It is terrible, is it not? Yes, terrible!"

He continued to ask and answer his questions as he followed Diana across the hall. He lamented his lot as he bolted the door again. The car moved down the gravel drive. The moonlit journey home was begun. The route by the Boulevard Carnot, above the sea pounding the headland, with its panorama of lamp-gemmed Nice, brought them back to the deserted Promenade des Anglais. At three o'clock they ascended the hill of Baumettes, and, as noiselessly as possible, drew up at the door of the villa. The chauffeur carried Lady Glent to her room.

"I shan't attempt to undress her," said Mason. "It's better to let her sleep it off. We'll have to stop her going to that Princess Wantadrinky woman somehow. I had my suspicions when she called here, miss. She probably gets a living at this sort of thing."

"A living—do you mean she sells drink, Mason?" cried Diana in amazement.

"Not drink—the other stuff; that's more profitable."

"The other stuff—what?"

Mason looked at the young girl calmly.

"Don't you know that yet, miss—drugs! She could never get like this so quick on spirits."

Diana did not answer in her stupefaction. When Sir Lionel had spoken in such condemnatory fashion of this beautiful place, was it from knowledge? The poisoned paradise, he had called it. Now, all at once, its beauty had a cruel lasciviousness. This sub-tropical garden brought the vicious forces of life to abnormal efflorescence. Suddenly she felt she hated its glitter.

Now, as she sat at her dressing-table, in the morning sunshine, the events of the night before seemed fantastic as a nightmare. She had fallen asleep soon after three o'clock, and had been awakened at nine by the maid opening the shutters and flooding her room with light. The French breakfast of coffee and rolls was on a table by the window. Diana could not help responding to the beauty of the morning. In the distance the sea sparkled, Cap Ferrat was shrouded in mist but the crest of Montboron rose clear in the cloudless sky.

Already the gardeners were at work, one of them playing a hose on the emerald lawn, whose vividness had astonished Diana in a region where she expected nature to look sun-parched. Beyond the lawn was a vista of the water-garden, paved with red bricks set herring-bone fashion. The borders were bright with pink primulas. A sober, contrasting note was struck by three pines and a splendid old carob tree, with its shining dark pinnate leaves,

red flowers and long seed-pods. Thence the delighted eye danced into banks of mimosas and ranunculi, with rows of blood-red Darwin tulips to signify discipline in this riot of color. Beyond the pool stood a colonnaded garden-house, roofed with sunset tiles and backed by cypress trees, placed like sentinels to keep the peace of Eden.

Was it possible, thought Diana, that in the next room, dark and shuttered, a woman was sleeping off the effects of an orgy?

Her reflection was broken by the sound of voices in the garden below. She recognized them as belonging to Sir Lionel and Tuppence.

"What's here?" asked the man's voice.

"Four steps, sir, then a terrace with a stone balustrade."

She heard footsteps traverse the terrace.

"And now?"

"Three steps, sir, and you're on the garden path, with a pool at the other end," said Tuppence.

"Jove, I mustn't walk into that!" laughed Sir Lionel. "Take me along."

Presently they came into Diana's line of sight. It was Sir Lionel learning the geography of the garden, with the aid of Tuppence. He had memorized the paths to the colonnade. Now he was getting familiar with the formal garden.

Diana hurried over her breakfast, bathed and dressed. She was anxious for news of Lady Glent. She had just finished dressing when, as if in response to her desire, there was a tap on the door and Mason entered.

"Good morning, Mason, have you seen Lady Glent yet?" asked Diana at once.

"Yes, Miss Delaney. Her ladyship's just woke up. She's a head, of course. I'm keeping her in bed until midday. Sir Lionel won't know, as she often writes in her room in the mornings."

"That's wise. I'll take Sir Lionel for a walk—he likes to call in at the Negresco for coffee about noon. Do you think Lady Glent'll be—possible by lunch?"

"Yes, miss—her ladyship comes back wonderfully, only——"

Mason hesitated and looked at Diana.

"Only what—you fear something, Mason?"

"You see, she goes in bouts, miss—she may want to go off again this afternoon."

"Then I won't leave her, Mason," said Diana. "You're sure she hasn't any of the stuff on her—what is it called?"

"Heroin—no, I've gone through her things, miss. But it's difficult to find. I once found some in the top of her parasol."

"However does she get it—I thought it was terribly difficult?"

"It is, miss, in England—that's why it's whisky there. But here—why, there's a kind of trade-union. They've all sorts of signs and ways."

"Wouldn't it be better for her to have a—a nurse?"

Mason shrugged her shoulders.

"You mean a keeper, Miss Delaney? Well, her ladyship wouldn't have that, and it would make people talk, wouldn't it?" said Mason.

"They talk now, surely?"

"It's mostly in the family, miss—and her ladyship does pull up sometimes."

"She fights against it?" asked Diana.

"Oh yes, she does, poor thing. You know she wasn't always like this, miss. It was the shock of Sir Lionel that turned her. And, of course, it's made her terribly suspicious and jealous. That's why she can't bear the thought of Sir Lionel marrying. His wife might come between them and get her put under restraint. She dreads that, poor soul. A mother's a mother, isn't she?"

Diana did not answer, her eyes were following Sir Lionel in the garden below. He was walking alone now, feeling his way with a stick, Tuppence following behind by order, watchful of every step. But for the exact pacing, no one would have suspected it was a blind man learning the way about his garden.

Diana turned to Mason. She was a good, honest creature who had been in the family since a girl.

"Thank you, Mason, for telling me all this. You can trust me," she said.

"I know I can, miss. And her ladyship knows that too."

"Lady Glent knows?" asked Diana in surprise.

"Oh yes, Miss Delaney. She knew you'd found out, and she told me she thought you weren't the kind that would turn Sir Lionel against her."

Mason's words went to Diana's heart. So under the antagonism, based on fear, that poor woman had hoped for sympathy and friendship.

"I'll have to go now, Miss Delaney. Shall I say how we fetched her home?"

"If she asks, I suppose you must, but there's no need to mention me."

With a smile, born of their common situation, the maid left the room.

It was at that moment a resolution came into Diana's mind. She was going to stand by Lady Glent, not only for Sir Lionel's sake, but also for his mother's. She would try what could be done by patience and understanding. Lady Glent should know she had in her an ally, and not a spy.

III

When Sir Lionel and Diana arrived back from their walk along the Promenade des Anglais, it was nearly lunch-time. He had been greeted by many friends enjoying the bright morning sunshine, and Diana lost him for nearly half an hour when he was carried off by some one for a cocktail. He was brought back to Diana, with an escort of half a dozen bright young men and women, to whom she was introduced. The men were cordial to her, the women, felt Diana, slightly critical. She wondered if it could be jealousy, and then reproached herself for being so presumptuous.

Sir Lionel was in his gayest mood. He insisted on hiring a horse-carriage and being driven home along the Promenade.

"There are moments when I want to feel imperial. A horse and carriage always give me that feeling," he said, reclining back as they started off. "Did you see a strange old woman by the kiosk just now?"

"With a veil?" asked Diana, recalling the old woman who had ambled by.

"Yes—they say that years ago she was the Shah's mistress. When he was assassinated they gave her

a State pension. She's never left the Riviera, and it's said she has not missed a night at the tables for thirty years. Personally, I think she's a retainer of the Casino's. Every healthy gambling place has to have a number of Notable Characters. There's the Jewel Man, for instance."

"Who's he?" asked Diana, watching a car containing a Russian Grand Duke that had just emerged from his villa on the front, with two equerries in Cossack uniform. Every day the place grew more like a film studio.

"Ah, you'll know one night," laughed Sir Lionel. "He hangs around the tables, and when he sees you are having a bad time he approaches and discreetly offers you a cash price for some pieces of jewelry he sees on you."

"Then I shall never meet him," replied Diana, "for I've no jewelry on me."

Sir Lionel turned and looked at her with a pretense of seeing.

"No? Well, you're looking wonderfully pretty in that costume!" he said.

"Sir Lionel, what a hypocrite you are! You don't know what I look like, thank heaven!" cried Diana, embarrassed but pleased by his praise.

"Oh yes, I do, my dear Miss Delaney. You're wearing a coat and skirt with a diamond-pattern and striped jumper, and a most chic little cream felt hat, covered with georgette and silk!"

Diana laughed at his description. She was glad he knew she looked nice.

"Some one's been gossiping—and only a woman could have described my costume like that!" cried Diana.

"Love is not blind, my dear young lady," he said banteringly.

"Oh! then it was a man. He must be a designer!"

"I've no doubt he is," admitted Sir Lionel.

"Who was it—some one in that group outside the Negresco?" asked Diana.

"Yes—myself," chuckled Sir Lionel, with that bird-like tilt of his head which she knew so well.

As soon as Diana entered the villa, Mason sought her, with the message that Lady Glent wished to see her in her room. Diana went up at once to the large, balconied front room.

Lady Glent was still in bed, a tray with some untouched food and unopened letters at her side. She looked terribly pale, the deadness of her skin increased by the feverish brightness of her eyes.

"Sit down, Miss Delaney. Excuse this light. I can't bear the shutters open."

Diana sat down and picked up the letters.

"Shall I open them for you, Lady Glent?" she asked.

"Yes—but I want to ask you something."

Diana looked up and found Lady Glent's burning eyes fixed on her. She lay propped up by pillows, and in the gray light Diana noticed how old this woman looked without the effect of her clothes. The thin lips were bloodless, the cheeks creased, and the flesh of the throat sagged over the lace frills of her bed-jacket.

"You are to tell me the absolute truth, my dear. Did you see me last night?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Where—and how did I get home?"

Diana could not evade the question.

"You were at Princess Wonteriki's. You were very late and Mason grew alarmed, so we fetched you home, Lady Glent," said Diana, quietly.

"At what time?"

"About three o'clock."

Diana saw Lady Glent's thin hands tighten as they grasped at the linen bed-sheet. There were a few moments of embarrassing silence.

"I see you know all about me, Miss Delaney—what I've become——"

"Oh, Lady Glent, please——" began Diana.

"Yes, you know. You had to know, sooner or later—though you guessed some time ago, I saw that. Well, when are you going?" asked Lady Glent.

"Going?" echoed Diana, sitting up straight in her surprised dismay.

"I expect you'll go, like all of them. I'm a disgusting old woman."

Diana rose to her feet and went towards the bed.

"Lady Glent, oh please don't say that! You must not say that. I know how you have suffered. You needn't despair, really you needn't!"

Something in the girl's voice made Lady Glent look at her critically.

"You mean you don't find me loathsome, contemptible, not fit to be near my boy—for I'm all that and more!" cried Lady Glent. "I drink, and when I can't get drink I take drugs, and I—you saw me last night. Didn't that disgust you?"

"No!" said Diana, lying firmly. "If I'd suffered what you have suffered, I don't know what I should

have become. When one's nerves give way——”

“My dear girl—you are being very kind to me. Can't you see I'm a menace to Lionel's happiness?”

“He loves you beyond all that—however much he feels it.”

Lady Glent looked sharply at the slim girl standing at the foot of her bed. The light was so dim she could hardly see her face.

“Come here!” she said, a little harshly.

Diana suppressed her quick fear and approached.

“Are you in love with my son?” asked the woman in bed.

Diana stared at the feverish face. The direct force of the question left her wordless for a moment.

“No—I am not in love with Sir Lionel. You needn't fear that, Lady Glent,” she said, firmly. “I am in love with—some one else.”

“I should not fear that now—though I did. You saw that?”

“Yes.”

Lady Glent held out a frail hand, white as the lace at her wrist.

“Come here, Diana!”

It was the first time she had been called by her Christian name. Wonderingly she drew nearer until Lady Glent could take her hand.

“You are a dear child—I trust you,” she said. “You will not turn my son against me. There would be no hope—no hope,” she repeated, slowly, “if he sent me away. I try now, even if I fail.”

The confession wrung Diana's heart with its mingled despair and love. Suddenly, in an impulse of compassion, she placed her arms around the woman in the bed.

"Lady Glent—you won't fail always. You'll win, I know you'll win. You love Sir Lionel too much to go on failing. And he'll not send you away. He hopes too, don't you see that? We can fight it; oh, we can, I know. Let me help, if I can. Sir Lionel, Mason and I, you can trust us, can't you?"

Lady Glent made no answer, but Diana felt her arms tightened about her. And then, by the quivering of her body, Diana knew Lady Glent was crying quietly.

She did not move or speak. It was not a time for words, but all that a mere girl could express by the tenderness with which she held her in that dim room was expressed. There was healing in that flow of sympathy between them, and the peace of understanding. When at last Lady Glent spoke, Diana knew by the kindness in the voice that her motive was not misjudged.

"Diana—you are too hopeful. I shall fail again," she said.

"Yes—but we shan't lose hope. Everything well done takes time. We shall have confidence in that," answered Diana.

Lady Glent did not answer, but taking Diana's hands in hers she pressed them, and felt the girl's lips leave a kiss on her cheek.

"You must go to lunch now—you can tell Sir Lionel everything. It's useless pretending any more," she said. "He'll know why I don't come down."

"Lady Glent—I shan't tell him anything about last night. Why need we distress him? I shall say you have a bad headache, and perhaps he'll give us the benefit of the doubt."

She smiled cheerfully at Lady Glent, and was about to leave when a gesture detained her.

"You must do something for me, dear. Give me my chatelaine—it's on the dressing-table," said Lady Glent.

Diana carried it to the bedside and watched her employer take out a small locket, which she opened. It contained a miniature of Sir Lionel. But it was not to show Diana this that she had called her back. Unscrewing the locket quickly, the glass and the ivory portrait fell out. There was something in the shallow space at the back which she passed to the girl.

"You see—I've even used Lionel to cover my vice," she said with a wan smile. "You must take that, dear, and let me have a little occasionally. I can't stop it all at once."

"I understand," replied Diana. "It shall be your property."

Lady Glent replaced the miniature, and Diana, leaving the room, carried a flame of hope burning in her heart. That last act of absolute confidence had sealed the sincerity of Sir Lionel's unhappy mother.

She ran up to her room to tidy herself before lunch, which was served on the open loggia with its white pillars swathed in pink, white and red roses. On her table were some letters—three from England, one in her mother's handwriting and one from U.S.A. The handwriting on the envelope sent a thrill through her, and although the luncheon bell sounded as she picked up the envelope, she could not resist opening it.

"My darling Diana," began the first sheet. Rapidly she counted the sheets—seven! In rapture she pressed the letter to her lips, and then glanced at the end, signed "Your devoted David," with a fencing underneath that is the tail-piece to all such letters. Determined not to spoil her pleasure by hurried reading, she tucked the letter into her bodice, there to be warmed by her quickened heart, dabbed her face with a powder-pad, gave a quick glance in the mirror and ran downstairs.

Out on the loggia Sir Lionel was awaiting her. As she sat down opposite to him, apologizing for Lady Glent's absence before the impassive Johnson, she felt grateful that she had not to suffer Sir Lionel's scrutiny, for her own shining eyes could have hidden nothing.

IV

Diana escaped immediately after lunch to read her letter. She took it to the spot she loved most in this exquisite garden. It was a little knoll, terraced with beds of red pelargoniums and primulas, and looked west upon the gray sheen of the hills which shone silvery against the dark cypress trees in the foreground. Here, on a white garden seat that was backed by a wall covered with ivy-leaved geraniums, jasmin and heliotrope, Diana had spent many sunlit hours reading to Sir Lionel. It was Tuppence's daily custom to fetch the newly-arrived *Times* of the previous day from the kiosk by the Jetée, and for her to read it to Sir Lionel during tea. But to-day, at four o'clock, he was going to take her to a *thé-dansant* in the ballroom of the Hôtel

Negresco. They went there often, for Sir Lionel liked dancing, and met his friends there, and Diana enjoyed seeing this fashionable gathering of expensively gowned women. It was also an hour of fascinating gossip, of a scandalously biographical nature, that surpassed anything Diana had met in fiction. It would have made a bishop turn in his cope.

Diana pulled the letter out of her bodice. There was not a sound in the garden except the occasional crescendo of a car passing along the Promenade. It was so silent after this passing that even the afternoon shadows seemed to creep audibly across the garden. The shutters of the upper windows were closed, it was as if the house slept.

Diana, with the letter in her hand, delayed the pleasure in order to enjoy the pleasure of delay. This was his third letter. She did not think it possible that any other girl had ever had letters quite like his, so full of vivid joy in life, so apt in creating a picture, expressing an emotion.

At last, conscious she had won the reward of patience, she took the sheets from their envelope and read. He was well, and enjoying the rush of his life in New York. The play had had a splendid reception on the first night and looked like having a steady run. He was much entertained, too much, and had declined invitations that would have kept him in America for the next six months.

"They are the most hospitable people on the face of the earth, I think. I can have anything from a private swimming-pool on the forty-second floor, offered me yesterday by a stockbroker, to a case of whisky—a gift more highly valued here—offered

me by a famous attorney. I accepted the water and declined the whisky, which again made my American friends feel they will never understand the British. But these wonders are not going to delay me a minute. The first liner that takes me to you takes me to felicity, my darling. Alas, there is no Diana with her bow, in the Central Park here, and a disconsolate David has looked for her in vain. There are lovely faces in this Babylonian city of the Hanging Garden of Masonry, but not yours, and so they think me 'wistful,' as a reporter here described me.

"To-morrow I am visiting some friends outside New York, motoring, if we are not snow-bound. I expect you are now enjoying Riviera sunshine, so I am sending this letter direct to Nice. I received your third letter yesterday.

"Diana darling, the really important news has been saved until the last. I have booked my passage on the *Majestic* on January 25th. I shall get off at Cherbourg, not Southampton! You can guess why? For I have something to say to you so very important that I cannot trust to writing, something I have wanted to say for a long, long time."

She read and reread the letter, and the last paragraph was almost memorized when, at the approach of footsteps down the path, she slipped the sheets into the envelope. To Diana's surprise it was Lady Glent, so pale that she rose and hurried towards her.

"Lady Glent—why have you come out? You look so ill," cried Diana, supporting her.

Lady Glent did not answer until she had reached the bench, on which she sat almost on the verge of collapse. Diana felt the hand resting on her own

tremble. Then, by an astonishing effort, Lady Glent seemed to regain her customary composure, and looked at her companion with calm eyes which could not, however, hide their despair.

"There is something the matter, Lady Glent—can't I help you?" asked Diana. Could it be that already the unhappy woman was weakening in the effort they were to make together? Was it for that she had struggled out into the garden—to beg for some of the drug she had relinquished? If so, the battle began here, now. What a setting for such a grim scene!

"Diana, my dear child—look!" said Lady Glent, with a quick gesture thrusting a letter into her hand. "Our last hope is gone. He won't operate."

In a moment Diana knew to what she referred. David's letter and her own selfish joy had made her forgetful of other people's anxiety. Now, in a flood of poignant realization, she knew the death knell of hope was in this letter thrust into her hand. She opened it and read, while Lady Glent watched her face. It was brief, written in French, dated from Paris.

"DEAR MADAME:

"I have now had an opportunity of inspecting Sir. Lionel Glent's reports. I regret to say that their nature does not permit me to entertain any hope of an operation, nor to justify any such experiment. It is with deep regret, and inevitably, I express this opinion.

"With sincerest respects,

"I am, Madame, your obedient servant,

"OTTO LEININGER."

There was a long silence in the garden. Neither of them could speak, both felt the futility of speech. For Diana the beauty of the place was marred. There was something almost cruel in its flamboyant beauty, its parade of beneficent Nature. Even the crawling insects could see. In this bright day the flitting bird seemed an indifferent jest against that poor inmate caged in endless night. Darkness now, without hope of dawn.

The two women, sitting in the garden, with no word spoken, felt everything was said in their bond of grief. When at last the silence between them was broken, it was Lady Glent who spoke.

"At least, he is honest with us," she said, quietly, folding the letter.

"I feel terribly to blame. I raised this false hope," confessed Diana.

The elder woman stared at her, and then comprehended.

"My dear child—what nonsense! You mustn't think such a thing. We are grateful to you and your brother. Now we know——"

"The worst," interrupted Diana, bitterly. "This is Cæsar—there is no appeal beyond Cæsar. He has been hoping—I know he has, although he didn't talk of it. Oh, Lady Glent, he is so wonderful—he deserves some reward. And they talk about God being kind!"

"My dear, he'll remain wonderful," said Lady Glent, and the pride in her voice did not escape Diana. "But God knows how I shall break this news," she said, tremulously.

"You will tell him soon?"

"At once—we can't keep him in suspense like this.

I'm going to tell him now. He said you were going to the Negresco for tea. That's a good thing, you'll keep him from brooding."

Lady Glent got up from the bench, and surveyed the garden.

"I wonder," she said at last, "why some of us have so much to face and others just flit through life? I suppose hundreds of women regard me as a fortunate creature. We've all that money can buy, and the one thing it can't buy we've lost."

Diana did not answer her, for her remark had not called for an answer. She watched Lady Glent walk back into the house, her thoughts busy. How true it was of these fortunate unfortunates into whose lives she had lately come. There was scarcely one of these well-dressed, well-placed men and women who had not some trouble, often of their own making. They overspent, or loved vainly, or lived madly. They had nothing to do, yet could find no time to spare.

Here on the Riviera, where they came for the sunshine, they rarely appeared until midday, when long lunches took up the early afternoon. And the sun was gone by half-past three. At its setting the whole Riviera burst into light and life. Dinners and dances and the Casino absorbed the night. In the early hours a tired world of frivolity sought its bed. The escape to sunshine—and happiness—what a mockery it was!

But Sir Lionel had not deserved the cruelty of his fate. His courage and cheerfulness only served to increase Diana's sense of injustice. For the remainder of his days he was buried alive, in a tomb where no ray could penetrate. Yet he could smile

and laugh, take a vivid interest in life and show consideration for others. Had tribulation brought him these qualities? But for his blindness would he be just a fashionable wastrel, jaded with a round of petty affairs? Diana began to glimpse some virtue in his affliction. Perhaps life imposed compensations as well as penalties.

It was half-past three, the garden had lost its vivid note and had grayed in the waning day. Diana rose and went up to her room to prepare for going out with Sir Lionel. She must be cheerful this tea-time, but not too noticeably so.

Three unopened letters on the table caught her eye. In the excitement of receiving David's letter before lunch she had forgotten them. The handwriting on one of the envelopes was Cherry's, from whom she had not heard since she had begun her tour with the company.

"Dearest Diana," it began, in Cherry's bold, large script. "We are at Manchester this week and I think of you basking in sunshine beside a blue sea until I am unbearable with envy. The tour has gone well. We opened at Dover, then Newcastle, and came here last Sunday. They are a very jolly lot of girls, and *one* nice man, but married, of course. That would be my luck. Why is it that I like married men always? Is it because they are married, or are they married because they are likeable, or does marriage do something to them that makes me like them, or—but my dear, I get quite dizzy psycho-analyzing and turning over my 'complex,' as is the fashion these days. Actually, I find I am fascinated by the way his eyebrows meet across the bridge of his nose, and the manner he has of holding his pipe

in his left hand. Isn't it too absurd! He hasn't lived with his wife for five years, but since that's the habit of our profession I can't hold that up against him. And he hasn't looked at me once, which both helps and provokes me. And if he did, I should freeze.

"Diana darling, it's no good my writing rubbish like this. It isn't what I want to tell you at all, darling, but I just don't know how to begin, and I've had the most terrible time since I knew. But I feel I must tell you, though I don't want to, and I've thought and thought and thought until I can't think any more. It's about Meriel Fillison, whom I'm understudying. I have tea in her dressing-room during the second act, when neither of us are on for a time, and we've become very friendly. She's been quite nice and helped me a lot, which stars don't generally do for understudies, whom they detest. But she hasn't been like that a bit with me, and we've become quite confidential. Well, last night she was very excited because of a letter she had just received. I could tell by her eyes, and all at once she said, 'My dear, I've the most tremendous secret. You didn't know I was married, did you? This letter's from him. We were married the day before he sailed to America. It's David Hameldon, Arthur Wargrave's secretary!'

"Diana darling, you can imagine how I felt. Oh, my dear Diana, I hate telling you this but I feel I must. I couldn't and wouldn't believe it at first. Then she showed me his letter from New York, and of course I knew from you that he was in New York.

"She said they were married at a registry office.

It seems they used to go down to a cottage at Tring, that Mr. Wargrave lent them. This tour will only last ten weeks, and after that, if she's able to complete it, she'll leave the stage for a while. Of course she expected me to be very sweet and sympathetic, and I had to act as I've never had to act in my life. I simply didn't know how to look at her. It's terrible for you, Diana, and it would be awful for her, poor thing, if she knew. It makes me feel I just hate men.

"Diana dear, you will bear up, won't you? I know you're full of pluck. It's such a terrible letter to have to write. And I hardly know how I'm going to face Meriel Fillison to-day. I went on in a daze last night and ran out of the theater the moment I was dressed. His letter was the most loving thing imaginable. Aren't men blackguards? I shan't say a word to poor Meriel—it can't alter things and would only make her wretched. Dear Diana, forgive me for telling you all this, but I feel I simply must, and it would be too cruel to let you go on being deceived by this miserable creature. It explains so much that made me wonder about him. He seemed always so elusive in what you told me. No wonder. Will you write to him? I don't think I should. Or if I did, then very briefly, suggesting he should address his letters to *his wife*. But I really don't know what I should do.

"Diana darling, this is an awful letter to write. When you've had a good cry, I know you'll hold up your head and simply dismiss him. He isn't worth thinking about. Darling, if only I was with you. Write to me when you can, and forgive me sending such awful news.—Your devoted Cherry."

Diana read the letter straight through, and when she had read it, she sat very quiet, looking out over the bay, now fading in the tide of night. She sat, with her hands in her lap, the letter crushed between her cold fingers. Cherry was wrong in one respect. There were no tears. She could not cry, for something deep down in her had frozen the source of tears. It was as though she had passed beyond life and feeling, and this was simply her body sitting in the chair, with another strangely detached Diana looking at the creature.

She sat on, not moving, while the gray and purple dusk came over the garden. And perhaps she saw the lights leap forth, cold and starry along the crescent of the Promenade and up on the heights of Montboron, and the brightest, coldest light of all, in the lighthouse at the tip of Cap Ferrat, intermittently stabbing the night.

There was a knock on the door. In response to her call, Tuppence entered.

"Sir Lionel is ready, miss," he said, wondering why she was sitting in the dusk.

Diana heard herself say, "I am coming down, thank you," and the voice seemed to have no connection with her body. Mechanically she rose, dressed and went downstairs. A few minutes later they were driving to the Negresco.

V

The large hall where they held the *thé-dansant* was crowded, but Sir Lionel had taken the precaution of booking one of the small tables around the open dancing floor. As they entered an exhibition

dance was in progress. Two young professionals, the man robust and half-nude, in the costume of a Greek soldier, was dancing with his partner, a slim young woman whose suppleness was not hampered by unnecessary garments. The whole dance, as the costumes, was designed for sensual effect. A gathering of hard-eyed women looked critically at the dancers, condescending admiration in their regard of the man, competitive hostility in their acceptance of the woman. Finally the soldier compelled the temptress to surrender, and carried her off, limp above his head, to a triumphant crescendo of the orchestra and the polite applause of the audience.

Sir Lionel and his companion were not left alone at their table for long. Mrs. Wilford came over to Diana, to introduce a friend who sought a dance. Sir Lionel took Mrs. Wilford. The young man dancing with Diana was an adept, as well he might be, for he informed her almost at once that he lived in Paris, Deauville, Biarritz and Monte Carlo. The color of his skin and the softness of his eyes suggested he had found those places via the Argentine or Asia Minor. He accepted her as just something to dance with, for which, in her mood, Diana was grateful. The whole thing had become a trance. When her dance was finished she was relieved to find a group gathered around Sir Lionel's table. He was in good spirits and his laughter and talk kept the party bright. Towards the end he asked her for a dance.

"You're very quiet," he said, as they reached the floor. "Does this bore you?"

"I have a headache," answered Diana, inventing an excuse.

"Oh, I'm sorry—perhaps you should not have come. It's stuffy in here—there's a storm working up outside, I can tell by the wind. We'll go after this."

She did not wish to spoil his pleasure, but she felt she could not endure this hard bright room any longer, and she let him take her away after the dance. In the darkness of the limousine, when they had entered and the chauffeur had closed the door, she felt safer, and lay back on the cushions, her head throbbing. The car started on its homeward journey.

Suddenly Sir Lionel sat up and turned to Diana. Something had dropped on the back of his hand, something wet.

"Why, you're crying!" he said, kindly. "What's the matter, Miss Delaney?"

"Nothing!" she choked, but the sob in her voice belied her. She felt his hand grope for hers, and the sympathy of the act was too much for her. Suddenly she broke into unrestrained sobbing. The next moment his arm was around her and she had buried her face on his shoulder, where he held her as they went through the darkness.

He did not speak for some time, realizing she must find relief in this storm of emotion. When she grew quieter he asked, very gently, the cause of it, adding, "if you care to tell me."

He was so gentle, so quiet, and her need of sympathy and comfort at that moment was so great, that she found herself telling him everything. He listened without saying a word until she had told him of the letter from Cherry Carmen.

"I can't think how a man can be such a black-

guard—you poor child!" he said, pressing her closer to him.

He picked up the speaking-tube and she asked what he was doing.

"You can't go into the house like this—we shall be there in a minute. I'll tell Wilson to drive out to Californie and back. That'll give you time to compose yourself."

She let him speak to the chauffeur. The darkness of the car was a refuge, and she was dreading the eyes of the servants at the Villa Dardanelli. Her power of acting was spent.

Sir Lionel talked to her, quietly, with a gentleness that brought the tears back to her eyes. She found herself telling him the whole story, from the first wild night in the Nottingham Goose Fair and her father's anger, down to the last afternoon when she had said good-by to David Hameldon. She was grateful that he did not trouble her with many questions. He merely encouraged her to talk, knowing it eased her.

"You poor child," he said. "And I've been envying you your happiness so much. I could tell at once when you had come back from seeing him."

"You could tell?" she cried. And suddenly conscious that she was lying in his arms, she sat up with a quick sense of dismay at her conduct.

"Yes, you were so wonderfully bright. And I knew when you had letters—two here, Diana?"

"Yes, two—but how——" she stammered.

He laughed in that boyish way of his when some little cleverness made her wonder.

"You see, I've watched you, Diana—and I know every shade in your voice."

She did not answer. There was something in his own voice that she had not heard quite so clearly before, and it filled her with alarm. Also, for the first time he had called her by her Christian name.

"Sir Lionel—you frighten me," she said.

"Frighten you. That's the one thing I wouldn't do. How do I frighten you?" he asked.

The car had turned back and they were approaching the villa. For a reason she could not analyze she felt thankful.

"You must have watched me very closely, if you know all this. And, please, oh, don't misunderstand me—but please don't call me Diana."

"Why not?" he demanded, almost sharply.

"Lady Glent would not like it, and others——" she began, but he interrupted her.

"Do you like it—or mind?" he asked.

She did not answer. She could not hurt him, and how could she mind really? But there was Lady Glent who might resent it.

Sir Lionel's hand somehow found and closed over hers.

"I shall call you Diana—unless you forbid me," he said, quietly.

She felt a pressure of his warm hand on hers, but she did not return it. He withdrew his own. To her relief the car turned in at the gates of the villa.

VI

But in the privacy of her room the tide of utter misery flowed over her again, and she sent word downstairs, excusing herself from dinner because of a severe headache. Mason brought in a light meal

and with it an inquiry from Lady Glent, who was dining with Sir Lionel.

Diana sent a message down. She was going to bed early and hoped to be quite all right in the morning. Mercifully Lady Glent did not come up to see her, and during Mason's presence she kept her face half buried in the pillow. The untouched meal gave color to her illness, and when the maid had taken it away she locked her door and walked up and down the room.

Should she write to him? If so, what should she write? Twice she attempted and could not continue for the tears obscuring her sight. She read and re-read Cherry's letter until its phrases had burnt into her brain. He had deliberately, wickedly, deceived them both. She had been blind not to see through his duplicity. It was clear now. Not once had she met him with a friend, nor had he suggested her meeting any of his friends. Always he had chosen the loneliest places for their excursions together. Utterly without shame, he had taken her down to the very cottage where he had seduced Meriel Fillison.

Her father and mother had been right. She had defied the conventions in the conceit of her own independence. She had given her trust and love into the keeping of a man of whom she had known nothing. Yes, her old father and mother were right. That was the kind of man who picked up girls, who had picked her up in the Goose Fair. She had courted her fate.

And then, in a sudden passion of despair, of love and hatred, she took out all his letters, tearing them to pieces, and with them his photograph, given to

her on their last day together. She tore them and tore them, the letters she had treasured and knew almost by heart. And she decided she would not write. There should not be a word from her. He should be treated with the utter contempt she felt for him. His letters would go straight into the fire, unopened. And, if, at last, he came to see her—if he dared to come to see her, then——

Then—then—but there were no words to measure her outraged love.

Suddenly she flung herself on the bed and sobbed, with her face deep in the pillow. She sobbed until no more tears would come, and in the darkness, in misery and exhaustion, she fell asleep repeating his name.

CHAPTER XXII

I

DAVID HAMELDON looked around him. Niggers, niggers, niggers! Or perhaps, being in New York, he should have said Gentlemen of Color. He had never seen so many black men in his life, nor seen them so well-groomed, so elegant or in a better state of enjoyment. His host had suggested this place as a diversion after the theater. He was a famous writer of negro stories, and knew this sad, suppressed race that had become one of America's nightmares. The three of them, Scotson their host, Wargrave and himself, sat at a little round table, one of a hundred in this immense basement hall, known as Mason's Paradise, in New York's Harlem, where the population of the streets at night seems to have no faces, so dark are they.

The ballroom was discreetly lit. Along two sides of it ran dining boxes. On the third side was a dais holding the orchestra, composed of some thirty negroes, all in evening dress, with smiles as broad and bright as their shirts. The floor was covered with small tables around which four persons could sit. They were all occupied by couples, two youths, two girls. The men were mostly young, elegantly dressed, their woolly hair either closely cropped or allowed to grow long, and heavily oiled to take out the kink.

In the middle of the room there was a vacant

space, railed in like a cattle-pen. This was the dancing floor. It became still more like a cattle-pen when the negroes and negresses were jammed into it so thickly that they could not dance, and the compact mass, being unable to move horizontally, wriggled vertically. During this diversion the lights were lowered, colored limes glistened ghoulishly on the shiny, sweaty faces of the black herd, and the orchestra in fiendish ecstasy poured forth a concatenation of jerky whines, groans, blasts and sighs which, dear to the negro heart, has insinuated its rhythms into the fashionable ballrooms of Europe.

"This is amazing!" exclaimed Hameldon, as he surveyed the wriggling herd, which might have been painfully sloughing its skin, so tortured was it by that convulsive trombone-ukelele-strident music.

"It's like an impressionist's painting, cubes, angles and fierce blotches of color. How long will this go on?"

"Till dawn—these niggers can sleep while they're dancing."

"Do you know, we're the only whites here?" asked Wargrave.

"Yep—they know me. They don't like outsiders. And they're right. Why should they have us spying on them? They've the natures of children. This isn't make-believe to them. It's real. Listen! They're back in the jungle!"

The instruments sighed, the black mass heaved under a green light. It might have been a liner coming into port at night, a whale rising in a moonlit sea or an elephant-herd moving in the jungle. It was something immense, grotesque, heaving with labor and destiny.

"Just look at that couple! Daphnis and Chloe in ebony. They're really beautiful," said Wargrave.

David Hameldon followed the direction of his eyes. At a table a slim youth sat looking into the face of a girl. She was like a shining berry. Her sleek dark skin was sheathed in a bodice so tight and dark that it was difficult to see where flesh ended and gown began. The line of her neck and breast was flawless, as also, in its particular negroid beauty, her full red lips opening in that petite oval face, with great wistful eyes.

A tawny, frail hand rested on her lover's shoulder. They had been drinking out of the same glass. Amid the din they were oblivious of everything except themselves. There was worship in the boy's eyes as he gazed on the girl. There was shy adoration in hers, pensive with their large dark pupils, as she looked at him. Slowly they leaned nearer each other until their lips met. They closed their eyes in the lingering ecstasy. It was a perfect picture of the frank impulse of Nature. They were not animals, not human beings. They were symbols of life and growth.

The cattle-pen had been cleared. Waiters swayed and shimmied to the music, bearing aloft trays of beer which they brought to their perspiring customers. Coming and going, they swayed to the music. The lights went down, there was a burst of applause. A yellow lime spluttered and flared. Into the open space came the solo artist.

She was a negress of about fifty. She wore a full pink and green skirt, that did not reach to the top of bulging elastic-sided boots. A length of

cotton stocking, showing, was red-and-white ringed. Her bodice was blue, in a huge hat she balanced six feathers. A green umbrella under her arms, she strode across the floor with ungainly steps. Her grotesque clumsiness provoked applause, particularly when gesture followed each bizarre suggestion of the blaring orchestra.

Then, piece by piece, she divested herself of her attire, and the old woman began to emerge through successive stages of nudity until, youthful, she swayed like a flower, lithesome in her single garment, a black pearl shining in that pale moonlight, making a pool of light as it followed her through the darkness. Finally, like a lotus-flower closing up its beauty, she sank down, until the visible part of her was the head only, drowning in an encroaching black flood.

The basement bellowed its approval. The lights sprang up. The couples rushed on to the floor. The orchestra renewed its frenzy. The hall seemed to rock with that marvelous rhythm of body and instrument.

At one o'clock Scotson said they ought to go. They were staying with the novelist at Rye, on the Sound. Outside, as they got into his big racing car, the long avenue of Broadway gleamed bright and deserted. The powerful car leaped forward into the night.

"Well, that's something I shall never forget," said Wargrave, to his host at the wheel. Hameldon was sitting behind.

"That's only a little of the night-life of Harlem," shouted Scotson, over the roar of the engine.

"I'll take you to one of the Duchess's receptions one night."

"What Duchess?" asked Wargrave.

"The Duchess of Uganda. She's the wife of the Duke. Haven't you heard of the scheme for a Black Kingdom in Africa? They're all to go back, and they're conferring titles already. I've met the Duke of Limpopo. Poor devils! Life's been cruel to 'em. They're a tragic race."

They were leaving the bright avenue now. The car roared in the still night. It was cold, the road frostbound, and as they came to the country, it was white with the frozen snow. Twice they skidded, but Scotson handled the car in masterly fashion. It was not possible to talk without shouting, for they were doing between sixty and seventy miles an hour on the broad, straight road. Hameldon, in the back seat, began to doze. Days of continuous activity and excitement, with too little sleep, had left him weary. The drumming of the car had a lulling effect. His head fell back on the cushion.

They had been running about half an hour when Wargrave also was overcome by sleep. How long he slept he never knew. He was suddenly awakened by a terrific crash and a sound of splintering glass. Then he seemed to be falling or flying, with all sense of gravity withdrawn, followed by a stunning impact, and silence.

When he opened his eyes again he wondered whether he was still sleeping. Something hammered in his ears and a weight crushed his head. He realized the sensation was a fainting one and lay still. But pain returned and cold. Suddenly he found he was lying on a bank of snow.

The shock of the discovery roused him. He sat up, aching terribly. Where was the car? Then he saw what he knew must be the car. It was completely overturned and badly smashed. Wargrave stared at it for a few moments. It was incredible that he should have come out of it alive.

And the others? He was alert now, and, suddenly, anxiety for them pulled him on to his feet, painful as it was. He slithered down the bank that had saved him, towards the overturned car. In the dark night the snow-bound road shone ghostly. A few yards away something black drew his attention. With a shock he knew it was a body, inert. It was Scotson. Wargrave stooped, touched him. A glance told him he was dead.

Wargrave stood still, rooted by the horror of it. And David—where was he? With a smothered cry he stumbled towards the car. There was no sign of him, anywhere. He examined the ground around. Not a sign. Then he looked at the chassis again. All at once he saw him.

"David!" he shouted, beating his way across the frozen ruts of snow. Three-quarters of a man's body lay, face upwards, black on the white ground. The legs were hidden under the car.

Wargrave slipped to his knees and put his arms under his friend.

"David!" he cried, lifting him so that he could see his face.

It was white, with closed eyes. Something had struck or cut him. There was blood down one side of the face and on the snow.

"David! David!" called Wargrave, shaking him, in ghastly apprehension.

The head fell inert against his arm. If only he could drag him free of the chassis! He had fainted in agony.

And then something in the face, in the heaviness of the head, filled Wargrave with terror.

"David! David! You're not dead, David!" he screamed, more to the night than to the dead man in his arms. Then, pressing his friend to him, he nursed the body in a frenzy of grief.

The powerful headlights of an approaching car found him thus, still kneeling in the snow, hugging the dead body of a man, crying over it in nerve-shattered abandon.

Almost by force they had to separate the delirious man from his friend.

CHAPTER XXIII

I

DIANA, following her daily routine at the Villa Dardanelli, became aware of a new kindness in the attitude of Lady Glent and her son. Although she had said nothing, Lady Glent seemed aware of the trial through which she was passing. Possibly Sir Lionel had mentioned something. Two days after the receipt of her letter, Diana learned by accident that on the same afternoon, when she had confided her troubles to Sir Lionel, he, too, had faced the knell of his own hopes. Lady Glent had read to him the letter from Dr. Leininger, just before he had gone to tea at the Negresco. Yet in his cheerfulness there, his sympathy afterwards, there had been no sign of his own trial. Diana would never have learned of it but for a chance remark of Lady Glent's.

As they sat in the garden now, after lunch, enjoying the last sunshine, setting the flowers and shrubs aflame, Diana looked at the blind man with a new sorrow in her heart. His gentleness to her these days made her aware, beyond all doubt, of the true nature of his regard for her. She had known it, intuitively, for some weeks, but she had denied the truth within her because acknowledgment would make her position so difficult.

While David existed, to the exclusion of everything else in life, she had no fear of Sir Lionel, for

he, on his part, knowing her love for David, had maintained an honorable control of his feelings. But now, in his gentleness, in his ceaseless desire for her company in all his pursuits, she discerned the beginning of hope. He had, throughout, been most careful to show no open change in his attitude towards her, but it did not require words for Diana to know that Sir Lionel was in love with her, and that he entertained hope of success.

It was going to be difficult, thought Diana. Why couldn't she love this man, who beyond all others commanded her admiration? Admiration—the whole failure was in that word by which she expressed her feeling. She admired him tremendously. He was so gallant towards her, so brave in his affliction. He had a buoyant, lovable nature, his whole being irradiated with that sunshine he would never see, but which enveloped him and gave its vitality to his eager life. But she did not, could not love him as she had loved David.

Had loved David! Again and again she asked herself whether that love was dead, as it should be. Each time, in determination, she assured herself that David had killed whatever love she had for him, that it was dead within her. But this assurance somehow never finally disposed of the question. Some memory of him, slight, fugitive, brought him back vividly into her life—a memory of him as he shook back the hair from his brow, or of his hand over the bowl of his pipe, or of a note of wistfulness in his voice, or of his laughter, or his eyes as she had seen them that last time when he parted from her at the fountain. He would not die in her heart. She knew he would

never quite die, although he belonged to another woman and had outraged her own love.

Thinking all this, in a continuous inner battle of the mind which had lasted since the receipt of Cherry's letter, Diana looked at Sir Lionel as he sat in his chair, his face towards the sun whose warmth he loved. She was conscious of his physical attraction as much as of the mental appeal she found in him. Bronzed with these days in the sun, fastidiously dressed, for he insisted on Hilton preserving an immaculate appearance, Diana wondered why she did not love him. He lacked no quality that commended him to her affection, it was merely that the indefinable something was missing. Good fortune had brought this man into her life, but honesty would not let her simulate the passion she did not feel.

It was Lady Glent who broke her contemplation by rising suddenly and exclaiming—

"It's getting chilly now the sun's going. I hope neither of you is going out to tea. Captain and Mrs. Walker are coming over from Cap Ferrat."

"Then we'll be talked to death!" said Sir Lionel. "Oh, how tired I am of those rabbits of his!"

"Rabbits?" asked Diana, puzzled.

"Captain and Mrs. Walker, you must know, have won a prize with a buck Angora rabbit. They run a farm for the skins—or is it wool? We shall talk Angora for the next two hours. I shall counter the conversation by talking dogs."

"Leo, I forbid you to be rude to poor Mrs. Walker!" said Lady Glent, before she left them to enter the house.

"I've got a terrible longing, Diana," confessed Sir Lionel.

"To be rude to Mrs. Walker's rabbit?"

"No, nor to her rabbit of a husband. I'm longing for Thingummy and Jingummy. After a month of this lizard-life I just long for a strong cold wind and the barking of the dogs, and the glow on one's cheeks after a walk. There's much to be said for England."

"How ungrateful you are!" exclaimed Diana. "I'm loving every minute of this place. I like the sun and the warm air, the flowers and the sea, the—oh, everything!"

"I suppose we are ungrateful. This morning even Tuppence was grumbling!"

"What about?" asked Diana, watching the red glow through the black pine-tree branches.

"He said he thought the cinema pictures should be in English, not French, seeing there are so many of us here."

"But I've heard Tuppence talking French, of a kind," said Diana.

Sir Lionel laughed and got up out of his chair.

"Yes—but he's never seen it in print and can't recognize it. Here he is, with the paper."

With his usual alertness to sound Sir Lionel had heard the boy long before Diana. Tuppence came down the garden with the *Times* under his arm.

"Captain and Mrs. Walker have come, sir—her ladyship asked me to tell you," said the page, giving Diana the paper.

"Oh, lord! That's cut in on our reading. Diana, do tell me what Consolidated Tea and Lands are quoted at—I can't wait till they've gone."

Diana opened the paper at the Stock Exchange Dealings and told him.

"Jove! They've fallen fivepence. We must drink more tea!" he cried, then, having heard Tuppence depart, "Diana, I've been wanting to tell you all day what a pretty frock you're wearing."

She laughed at his gay pretense.

"Sir Lionel, you're a charming hypocrite. You can't possibly know what I'm wearing," she cried.

"Oh, can't I? Then here goes. Our Woman's Page Editor writes—Pretty Miss Diana Delaney was seen taking her morning chocolate at the Grande Bleue in the company of that old bore, Sir Lionel Glent. She was much admired in an apricot-colored embossed chiffon coat, with a plissé skirt to match. She was wearing one of those Bakeu straw hats, which are so fashionable now, of an oyster color, and trimmed with pink petersham ribbon ending in gathered scrolls with mitered points. Her——"

"Stop!" cried Diana, laughing.

"Am I right?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes—who have you been talking to? The gossip here is dreadful!"

"Ah—you see, I keep my eyes open. If you will be the best-dressed woman on the Riviera you must expect all the lady journalists getting excited. When we get back to Town, I'm going to set up as a modiste, with you for mannequin."

"I don't believe you know what a plissé skirt is!"

"I don't!" laughed Sir Lionel. "But I insist that you look charming."

"I think it's time we went to the rabbits," said Diana, rising.

"I should much prefer going to the dogs," he retorted, taking her arm.

II

"My heart's in my mouth every time!" exclaimed Mrs. Walker, lifting her teacup. "Ah, Sir Lionel, how delightful to see you again! When are you coming to see our Angoras—we've a wonderful new farm down in Hampshire. I didn't want to come away, but the Captain always gets rheumatism in January if we don't come here."

She pressed Sir Lionel's extended hand, shouting up into his face, in the habit acquired from a long life with Captain Walker, who was short and deaf.

"Why is your heart in your mouth, Mrs. Walker?" asked Sir Lionel, before turning in the direction of Captain Walker, who had been presented to Diana.

"We were talking about the Corniche Road—in fact, all the roads. The chauffeurs in this part of the world have a mania for manslaughter."

"'Tisn't safe to go out, Sir Lionel. Egad, it isn't!" bellowed Captain Walker. "They come round the darned corners like madmen. We hardly dare come out in the car—'tisn't what you do—'swhat other fool does, eh?"

"The advantage of being stone blind is that you can't see what you've just missed. You should try it," said Sir Lionel, cheerfully. "It's soothing to the nerves!"

"Sir Lionel, you were always a Merryheart," cried Mrs. Walker. "I tell the Captain every time we start out that if it's our Fate——"

"Egad, Alice, your Fate'll meet you at seventy miles an hour one day!" shouted Captain Walker, impatiently. "I prefer a Fate you can put the brakes on. I see that Wargrave fellow's got smashed up—but in America you expect that. They've one car and two deaths to every five of the population!"

Sir Lionel's head tilted in its alert fashion. Like Diana he had caught at the name.

"Wargrave—not the dramatist?" he asked.

"Yes—it's in the *Times* to-day. Two of 'em killed somewhere outside New York. He was another of those harum-scarum chaps, I expect."

"And so clever!" interpolated Mrs. Walker, addressing Lady Glent. "My sister knew him as a small boy. They lived in the same place."

Sir Lionel put out a hand. He was wondering if Diana had heard.

"Have you the *Times*?" he asked.

Diana had brought it in from the garden. She gave it to him. To her surprise he put it down inside his armchair.

"Mother, we must drink more tea. My shares have fallen fivepence," he said.

"Egad, sir, that's nothing. Angora's fallen sixpence a pound! There's too many in the game now," cried Captain Walker.

Diana wondered why he didn't wear a monocle. He was almost a perfect stage specimen, with his stock tie, check waistcoat and port-wine complexion. The wondering was father to the article. He pulled

out a monocle, and screwed it into his left eye.

"Alice, tell Lady Glent what the Duchess said about Sir Peter Teazle when she saw him," he commanded, addressing his wife.

"Sir Peter Teazle—the name's familiar—do I know him?" asked Lady Glent.

"Our championship stud buck," explained Captain Walker, trying to hide his surprise at her ignorance.

Mrs. Walker embarked on a word-for-word account of the Duchess's ecstasy.

Diana, sitting there, thought they never would go. Sir Lionel, too, nursing the *Times*, must be anxiously awaiting their departure. She understood, now, his deliberate monopoly of the paper. He wanted to spare her an ordeal before the eyes of strangers. They both knew there was something in the paper affecting her. Two killed. Who were they? Arthur Wargrave and David? Or Wargrave and another, a friend perhaps.

Diana seemed to breathe again when at last the Walkers rose to go. Lady Glent accompanied them to their car.

"Please!" said Diana, when the door had closed.

Sir Lionel picked up the paper.

"Would you rather go to your room?" he asked before offering her it.

"No—I'll read it here—I'm expecting—anything," she replied, quietly.

The next moment the door opened. Lady Glent came into the room.

"Diana, my dear—how white you look!" she exclaimed.

"Mother—I'm afraid Diana has bad news," said Sir Lionel.

"Bad news?"

"Yes. Didn't you hear what Captain Walker said—about Wargrave's accident in America?" asked Sir Lionel.

"Yes, darling—but why——"

"Wargrave's secretary was David Hameldon—who went out with him. Perhaps he——"

"Oh, my dear Diana!" cried Lady Glent, comprehendingly.

Sir Lionel held out the paper towards his mother.

"We don't know yet, for certain. Walker said it was in to-day's *Times*."

Lady Glent looked from her son to Diana. Then she took the paper.

There was a long silence, a silence in which Diana felt the beating of her heart. She should really not care so much, whatever it was. He was nothing to her now.

Lady Glent ceased to scan the columns and was reading. Then she closed the paper and looked at Diana. The next moment she went towards her.

"My poor child!" she said, tenderly. "It's not Wargrave—it's David Hameldon."

But before she could reach her Diana had slipped from the chair in a dead faint.

Sir Lionel's quick ears heard her fall. In a second he was beside her, lifting her inert body from the ground.

CHAPTER XXIV

I

IN the week that followed, Diana, overwhelmed by a new sorrow, at last reconciled herself to the inevitable. It seemed that, but for the unfailing kindness of Lady Glent and Sir Lionel, she must have lost her reason temporarily. She knew now that her dismissal of David, after Cherry's letter, had been an unsuccessful attempt. Deceitful as he had proved, something, which made her love him as she could love no other man, had persisted through the revelation of his duplicity. She would have continued to love him secretly, unwillingly, despite his faults. With his death she could admit that much.

She recalled him now as he was in those moments when he had been most lovable in her sight. The warmth of his hands upon her, the ardor of his kisses, the quick light in his eyes when he looked at her—all these things she could now treasure without disloyalty to herself or to the woman widowed by his death. And, wicked as Diana felt it was, she could not help feeling that David belonged more to her than to Meriel Fillison.

Bit by bit she had pieced together, from Sir Lionel's reluctant conversation, some kind of a portrait of this woman David had married. Cherry's gossip had supplemented it. If it was at all just, Meriel Fillison was not the kind of person who

could feel anything very deeply for long. "She wanted no one who got in the way of her career," was the unkindest thing Sir Lionel had permitted himself to say of her. "It was right of her not to tie herself up to me—but I couldn't see it at the time," he added. But David had got in the way of her career, and probably she hated him for it.

There was one act of Chance for which Diana now felt grateful. By what little things our actions are given life or are frustrated! Shortly after the receipt of Cherry's letter she had sat down and written him a long, bitter reproach. Her letter had not been posted that same evening because she happened to lack the necessary stamps, and she had kept it back until she had an opportunity the next morning to go into Nice. But the morning found her in a changed mood, and she tore up the letter she had written with such passion. It would have distressed her now to recall that her last words to him had been so bitter.

Sir Lionel, acutely aware of all that was passing through Diana's mind in these days, was assiduous in his attention. He was careful not to show any desire to comfort her, and Diana did not fail to observe, with appreciation, that he had suppressed any revelation of his own feeling towards her. Day by day he walked or drove with her. Never once did he make any allusion to the way that might have been opened now that David was inevitably lost to her. Perhaps it was that he was only waiting, but she respected him for his patience. It was difficult to know how she would act if the time came when he made an appeal to her.

Diana looked at Sir Lionel now, as he sat with

his face towards the magnificent panorama before them. They had motored out from Nice, by the Grande Corniche Route, that magnificent road cut fifteen hundred feet high in the precipitous southern flank of the Maritime Alps. It was their intention to lunch at Monte Carlo. The route had revealed one splendor of landscape after another, but at the Col d'Eze Diana's enchantment was supreme.

She asked for the car to be stopped in order to take in the immense view spreading east, west and seawards. They descended from the car and walked a little way along the road to Eze, leaving the Grande Corniche. Here they found a seat, warm in the morning sunshine.

The scene was something beyond the mind's imagining. The most romantic passage of poetry might have found here its inspiration, where mountain, sea and man's ruined towers stood in perfect relationship. Diana tried to convey something of its beauty to her companion. Above them, the passing high clouds were torn by scarified peaks. Higher, the blue of a Mediterranean sky mounted to its hyaline dome. Eastwards they looked upon the line of mountains closing in this deep declivity at whose foot the sea, mistily blue, with belts of jade and mauve, fretted the rocks. As far as the eye could follow, headland, bay and peninsula on that tortured coast lay out in the morning sea, fading towards Italy.

The deep valley itself was broken by a rock standing solitary and abrupt, on whose narrow cone sat the village of Eze, vertiginously perched twelve hundred feet above the sea. The old walls bound

the bizarre houses, as if holding them in on their perilous height, and above them still towered the ruined castle of the Saracens, built where Roman centurions had kept watch.

"It doesn't seem real," exclaimed Diana. "It's like one of those pinnacled castles in German fairytales, where the bad baron lived, or the princess slept in a coffin of crystal until her lover came."

"Or the poor dwarf, who kept watch for a ship bearing the fairy princess, whose touch would transform him into a splendid king," said Sir Lionel. "Diana, I believe you're the princess and I'm the dwarf—the blind dwarf—and you're making me see again."

He sighed as if the thought hurt him, and it was the first time Diana had heard him lament his fate.

"Oh, if I only could!" she said, quickly, placing her hand on his arm.

"You could," he said, quietly. "Diana, you could make the world light for me."

The earnestness of his voice stirred something in her. She let her hand remain as his own rested upon it.

They neither of them spoke for a time. It was so quiet up on that height, in the thin, sharp air, that they seemed to have left the earth in its troubled journeying.

"Diana, do you know I have never seen you?" he said at last.

She turned her face towards him, puzzled by his remark.

"Not seen me?" she echoed.

"No—may I? I see by the touch."

She was startled a little when she realized his intention, but she gave no sign.

"If you wish," she said, quietly.

He raised his hand from hers and Diana felt his fingers hover over her face, touching her features with a moth-like softness.

"You are beautiful, Diana," he said at length.

"Do you think so?"

"I know you are. What color are your eyes?"

"Blue."

"And you have fair hair?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I like blue eyes—and fair hair," he said, softly, his hand closing over hers again.

Suddenly his clasp tightened, and his voice was almost a whisper.

"Diana."

She cast a glance at him, half fearful, half surprised. He had lifted his face in that manner she knew so well, and a faint smile hovered over his features as he leaned towards her.

With a quick impulse she put her lips on his, and felt his mouth pressed ardently to hers, his arms about her. They seemed to hear the silence stir round them as they clung together in that long kiss.

"Diana!" he said, and the thrill in his voice told her his meaning.

She drew back then, wondering why she had done this thing. She could not answer. It had been pity that impelled her, and she could not tell him that.

He seemed to be searching her face in the ensuing silence.

"Diana, you know I love you?" he asked.

"Please—do not say that," she said, casting an apprehensive glance around. They were quite alone on the mountain road.

"But I must say it—I've wanted to say it for so long. First I loved your voice, and then I loved your manner, and now I love you just for yourself."

"Sir Lionel, I——"

"Lionel," he insisted.

"Lionel," she repeated, reluctantly.

"Well?"

"I must be honest. It would be wrong to deceive you. Oh, I admire you, as I admire no other person on this earth—please, please don't misunderstand me, but I don't love you—that's something I can't pretend."

"I don't ask you to pretend—I don't ask you to love me. That may come. I can wait. I will wait," he pleaded.

His earnestness touched her. His face, so near to hers, seemed lit with the ardor of his spirit. It was hard to deny him.

"You must not do that," she said in a troubled voice. "You deserve some one worthy of you. There will be some one."

"It is you!" he said, smiling on her.

"No—it would be shameful to deceive you. I can never love any one as I loved David."

"It is too soon to say, Diana. Let me wait. He's too fresh in your memory. Forgive me—I'm a brute to be pushing myself like this. I'll wait, Diana."

She took his hands, in her agony of mind. She could not hurt him. Her heart was bursting with gratitude to him, gratitude, admiration and pity,

but not love. And anything less than love was unworthy of him. Why couldn't she love him? Why should David, worthless, with so little to offer in comparison, have drawn her love in this fashion? Even now it was something that glowed deep down in her. Of all men he stood apart. She could never make pretense to this man who offered her everything—his position, chivalry, love. The nobility of his nature protected him against deception, even had she the will.

Diana released his hands slowly.

"I think we should go," she suggested.

"I have asked for no pledge, Diana. You know that. I'll wait," he said, ignoring her remark.

"It's too unfair," she replied.

"It's my pleasure—give me that!"

He sought her hands again and she let him imprison them. For a long moment she did not answer.

"I would deny you nothing," she said, solemnly, at last.

He raised her hands and kissed them.

"That is enough, Diana," he said, standing up in readiness to go.

They went back to the car on the highway and continued the journey to Monte Carlo.

II

It was dusk when they began their return journey to Nice, taking the lower Corniche Road by the coast. Thronged with traffic, they followed the queue of cars, winding round high escarpments and promenades built under the cliff face on high via-

ducts, whence they looked down upon the sea. Rococo hotels, with terrace gardens, shone with lights, and from their bowers the white and pink villas betrayed themselves with windows glowing orange through the dusk.

When they reached Nice, falling down upon it from the corkscrew Col Villefranche, it was dark, with the city flashing at their feet, the Promenade binding the sea with a diamond rim. It was the end of a wonderful day of sunshine, of immense panoramas of romantic coastline, and lastly, of Monte Carlo, whose glitter never failed to excite Diana.

Sir Lionel throughout the day had been in the gayest mood. Diana had a battle with him at the tables, where he played recklessly. It was his whim to pretend that he was Blind Chance inspiring her. He lost and won and lost, and when he was twenty pounds down she begged him to leave the tables.

"Ah, you're not a born gambler—this is the moment when we take fortune at the flood. Look behind you," he said.

Diana looked behind her and recognized no one standing in the group watching the table.

"Don't you see him?" asked Sir Lionel.

"Who?"

"The man who will make you an offer for your pearls!"

"I haven't any, so he can't," laughed Diana.

"Then we must win some," he said, pushing five thousand-franc notes into her hand. It was in vain she protested.

"My kingdom for a pearl!" he cried.

He was right about the flood. When they left the table he had won sixty pounds.

"What did I tell you?" he said, as she led him away.

"It's a most terrible thing. That's how gamblers are made. I feel we're dreadfully wicked taking this money."

"We've taken it from wicked people," he retorted. "And now the jeweler's!"

"What for?"

"Those pearls!"

"Oh, no!" she said, halting and looking at him in amazement. "I couldn't possibly accept."

"Very well, then, I'll buy myself a memento—the jeweler's, please."

They found a shop in the Boulevard des Moulins. He bought himself a very small pearl pin. Then he bought his mother a gold card-case.

"And something for this lady," he said, finally.

The smiling assistant pulled forth a tray of articles. He had a seductive way of picking up each object in two highly manicured fingers. Made-moiselle would like this. Was it not unique? And this—oh, it was superb! Truly *ravissant*! And while Diana protested he lifted jewel after jewel from its velvet bed.

"Diana, I don't move until you choose something. The poor man will reach all the shop down. Don't you like that?" asked Sir Lionel, hearing the jeweler's rhapsody over his last selection. It was a thin gold chain with a chased locket studded with fine pearls.

"Three thousand five hundred francs, m'sieu. An exquisite thing!"

"Well?" asked Sir Lionel, turning to Diana.

"It is very beautiful, but——"

"Mademoiselle will take it," said Sir Lionel.

The jeweler smiled and displayed the purchase with an air of distress.

"Ah! mademoiselle—I am sorry to lose it. You are a connoisseur!"

So Diana bore away from Monte Carlo the spoils of those wicked tables. What would her father say? Certainly she was on the path of perdition, gambling in the notorious Casino and letting a young man buy her jewelry with his winnings. And yet, somehow she did not feel at all wicked.

As the car gained the Promenade des Anglais and approached the Villa Dardanelli, the happiness which youth cannot banish for long came back to her. This man sitting at her side, with his fine air of chivalry, his courage under terrible affliction, won the loyalty of her heart. It grieved her that she did not love him in the sense she had once known love. Short of that, he possessed her affection. Perhaps the other would come. At that moment she fervently hoped it might.

As soon as they entered the hall, Johnson came forward to Diana.

"There's a cablegram for you, miss. It came at three o'clock."

"For me?" cried Diana, surprised, taking it off the salver.

They entered the salon, where Lady Glent awaited them. While Sir Lionel told her of their day, and presented his gift, Diana opened the cablegram.

"Sailing Majestic twenty-fifth. Arrive Nice thirty-first. Arthur Wargrave."

Diana read it twice. It had been dispatched from New York. She turned to Lady Glent and her son.

"Whatever can it mean?" she asked, reading it aloud.

"From Wargrave—he's coming here! That's very decent of him," exclaimed Sir Lionel. "He probably thinks you want to hear about Hameldon."

Diana made no comment. It was going to open the wound again. To-day she was beginning to feel life was a good thing after all.

"I wonder if he knows about Meriel Fillison?" said Diana.

"Obviously not, my dear—unless he's learned since he cabled," replied Lady Glent.

"I think I'll cable, stopping him," said Diana, perplexed.

"Why? It's no trouble getting off at Cherbourg, the boat calls there," exclaimed Sir Lionel, and then, realizing she might dread reviewing the trouble of those past days—"P'r'aps you would rather not hear any details?"

Diana did not answer for a few moments, and they did nothing to persuade her. She hovered between prudence and desire. She wanted to know everything, every detail of his life up to that last terrible moment. Yet it was futile, it could alter nothing. And Sir Lionel, she must study his feelings a little. He was generous as ever, but this clinging to David was not fair if she was to give him

any hope. And she had decided only this day to give him hope. She wanted to love him.

"I think I'd rather Mr. Wargrave didn't come," she said, slowly. "It's very kind of him, but I shall cable him not to come."

Sir Lionel, standing there, felt relief in his heart. It was selfish of him, but he feared this ghost of David Hameldon. It was obvious now that Diana meant to banish it.

He sat down when she had left the room. Then, putting out a hand—

"Mother—come here!" he cried.

Lady Glent went over to him and took the outstretched hand.

"Mother, I told Diana to-day I loved her—you aren't angry?"

Lady Glent watched his face. The anxiety in it moved her and pleased her. There was no weakening of the bond between them.

"No, Leo—why should I be? I'm very fond of Diana," she answered. It was in her mind to tell him of their understanding, but she checked the impulse, and said, "I should like to feel Diana was with us always. I'm glad she loves you."

"She doesn't, mother," he exclaimed, with an immobile face.

"Doesn't—what do you mean?"

"Diana's so honest she couldn't think of deceiving me. It's Hameldon, mother, she still thinks of him, despite what he was."

"But that's ridiculous, Leo. She can't live in the past, a young girl like her. She'll forget him, you'll see. Time will change her."

"I hope so," answered Sir Lionel, slowly. Then,

smiling at his mother, "I said I would wait. I shall make her love me. I'm an obstinate devil."

Lady Glent bent and kissed him.

"Perhaps you were a little impulsive to speak so soon after her awful shock. Diana will love you, Leo. You are irresistible, darling."

"Oh!" he laughed, and patted her hand as he released it. "But I was relieved when she said she'd stop Wargrave coming. They'd talk David, and I'm jealous of that poor devil!"

The conversation was broken by the entrance of Diana, who had removed her hat and coat. She carried a newspaper in her hand.

"Shall I read for half an hour?" she asked, seeing mother and son together.

"Please!" cried Sir Lionel at once. "Stock Exchange first! What are those Teas doing?"

CHAPTER XXV

I

NICE was now astir with the approach of its Carnival. The hotels were filling with a last rush of visitors, and the loungers, rich and poor, found the streets and promenades full of entertainment. Stands for the viewing of the entrance of the grotesque King Carnival were being erected. Streamers, flags, triumphal arches and electric illuminations marked the route to be taken by the procession of floral cars, pierrots, jesters, maskers and squadrons of comic-opera knights.

Diana had found a new interest, but it was one for whose pursuit she reproached herself. - One day they had gone up to the tennis courts at the Park Imperial, and she had been persuaded to play. Such reports of her prowess came to Sir Lionel's ears that he insisted on her entering one of the tournaments, partnered by a friend. To her amazement they won the second prize, and Diana found herself much in demand subsequently.

This tennis world was quite unlike anything else she had met in Nice. It was truly cosmopolitan, recruiting its enthusiasts from French, English, American, Italian, Polish and Spanish players, but an overwhelming number appeared to come from the Russian colony living adjacent to the courts.

Sir Lionel obtained endless amusement from the tireless pursuit of Diana by a Russian Grand Duke,

who was a shocking player, but, at sixty, had lost neither activity nor amorousness. He called Diana his "leetle English rose-garten," a phrase that filled Sir Lionel with mirth. The old gentleman had such exquisite courtesies in his courtship that Diana hadn't the heart to snub him.

"Diana, here's your rose-gartener coming," exclaimed Sir Lionel, one morning, as he sat on the veranda of the club.

"How do you know he's coming?" asked Diana, apprehensively.

"I can hear him blowing, my dear!" he laughed.

He was right, the Grand Duke was coming up the steps and Diana had to smother her laughter. Again he had to lament his singular ill fortune in always finding Miss Delaney partnered. Occasionally, in sheer pity for the gallant old fellow, Diana found she had not made up for the next set. She sent him to the net to prevent him talking to her so much on the back line. Sir Lionel always greeted her return from these magnanimous occasions with anxious inquiries about "the Russian offensive."

These days of sunshine and laughter amid the favored sons and daughters of Man, had a steady influence upon Diana's unfolding consciousness. She began to see the world as an organization in which the rôles of life were allotted chiefly by caprice. For some they were easy, empty rôles. Here in Nice life could be seen, as a microcosm, in a blend of vanity, viciousness, beauty and wealthy ease.

A new world to Diana, it took from its Southern setting not only the languor and grace of the climate,

but also those sicknesses of mind that flourish in lives removed from stern effort. Here, in the round of affluent pleasure, there was much that was enchanting but more that was nauseating. Politicians seeking a brief respite during the Parliamentary recess; worn business men sunning themselves before their return to a brick-boxed servitude of Mammon; invalids, and men and women closing their lives in genial warmth; with these mingled the cohort of parasites. They were as varied as they were degenerate.

Diana found herself less contemptuous of the necessitous adventurers than of the affluent philanderers. These society manikins, some descended from quite decent stock, who insinuated their portraits into fashionable journals, whose breeding did not check their vulgar ostentation, no less vulgar because of its refined subtlety—Diana watched them with quiet indignation. They had money, appearance and birth, and with them they did nothing except agitate themselves in a round of futile pleasures and recurrent prostration on the altar of the senses.

The drugged, the divorced, the coroneted, the famous, the infamous, whirled indiscriminately in this maelstrom of fashion. One had her pearls, or her face, her pedigree, her ancestral home, her prize dog, her flawless leg, her ducal paramour—it mattered little if the possession was superlative and the photographic and paragraphic reproduction good.

So long as they could live feverishly in the delusion that they were of importance, they supported the vanity which they mistook for ambition. Their

one fear being to wither as the green herb, the withering was delayed by an army of masseurs, well equipped with every cosmetic device in the war against wrinkles. The lifted face and the lowered mind kept gay company with the handsome *gigolot* and the lascivious remittancer for whom Paris, London, Berlin, Madrid, Rome, Vienna and Budapest were halting-places on the road to senility.

There were moods in which Nice, the Queen of Flowers, seemed to Diana to be none other than the Hag of Withered Tributes, but perhaps her own disappointment gave a philosophic tone to a landscape made for happiness.

Through David she found herself thinking of England, of London and, in London, of Hyde Park. The Diana fountain, on the somber green of its lawn, in the bleaker setting of leafless trees and colder wind-freshened skies, had for Diana a wistful, potent appeal. She had been happy there, with a happiness in its element of struggle that she had not known in this place of sunshine and luxury. She was not insensible to good fortune or ungrateful to the Glents who had wrought such a wonderful change in her life, lifting it from the dreary usage of her provincial days into this bright affluence. But she knew the virtue of effort, the discipline of necessity.

When gazing from the veranda of the villa, upon a scene as fanciful as she used to see in the picture dealers' shops in Nottingham, her thoughts went back to those pastured shires. She superimposed upon the sheen of the Maritime Alps the Vale of Belvoir, with the faint spires of its churches in the misty air, the dark copses and gray fields,

and the red coats of the Hunt going over, Clawson way, with a view-halloo that sent the field madly riding down the ridge. Or she walked again in the arboreal nave of Clifton Grove, with the erratic Trent turning sharply within sound of the weir, hearing again the peacocks shrilling in the Hall garden. And thence she was in London again, and London was David.

Diana had no bitterness in these last days. Living, he had outraged her trust; dead, she kept nothing but a dream of him, romanticized by youth's first wonder. He was so vivid still, in moments of disjointed recollection—his voice, that first time, saying "Hello!" in the Goose Fair; the swift fire of his eyes in that moment when he had kissed her at the garden door; his lean, strong hand on the steering-wheel as they drove down Edgware Road; his face in those last moments as they parted by the Fountain on that desolate Decemb̄r day.

And now Lionel was in her life, so quietly insistent, so patient and understanding. There was no wrong in her acceptance of his love, but she knew there was no equality, and it troubled her. He was entitled to everything the woman he loved could give him. But such a love of its very nature must be spontaneous. There was a shadow in Diana's heart, for she knew too well a flame lowly burnt, where once the fire had leapt. In the comparison she felt a secret shame, an unworthiness.

There was not a day now but that this secret battle raged in her heart. As she left her balcony now, after sitting in the last sunshine of the afternoon, to go down to him, she was troubled. She was angry with herself for what seemed a perver-

sity. It was monstrous not to be in love with such a man.

Diana found Sir Lionel in his sitting-room, playing Brahms on the piano. He stopped immediately she came in. It was the time of their reading.

"I say, Diana, does that Proust bore you dreadfully?" he asked, alluding to the book she was reading to him, in French these days.

"No," she answered. "I'm enjoying it—why do you ask?"

He smiled, running his fingers through his hair in the odd way he had when slightly embarrassed.

"Well—it's a bit highbrow, isn't it?"

"Oh—so you think a woman can't be a highbrow?" cried Diana, challengingly.

"I'd never think that about you—you've a mind like a razor."

"Flatterer!"

"Honestly, Diana."

"I'd hate to be thought a highbrow—even if I do like Proust," she said, picking up the book.

"You really like him?" insisted Sir Lionel.

"Tremendously."

He was silent a space and then broke into laughter.

"Diana, I'm a terrible hypocrite. I can't keep it up. I'm bored by him! I was hoping you'd show signs first. I suppose it means I've a second-rate mind?" he said, with the quaintest smile on his face.

"Then we read no more Proust! I'm here to read what you like," said Diana.

"No, really, Diana, I——"

"Yes," insisted Diana, putting down the book.

"It's not a crime not to like any author. I simply can't endure——"

The door opened and Johnson stood on the threshold.

"There's a Mr. Wargrave to see you, miss," he said, addressing Diana.

Diana stood still, looking at the butler. She saw Sir Lionel stand suddenly alert. Neither of them spoke.

"He's in the salon, miss," added the butler, waiting.

"Miss Delaney will see him in a moment, Johnson," said Sir Lionel, in an even voice. The butler withdrew. When the door had closed, the blind man turned to the girl at his side.

"You will see him, Diana?" he asked.

"Mr. Wargrave?—I told him not to come."

"Perhaps he had to come."

"Why?" asked Diana, very white.

"Hameldon may have said something at the end—for you."

Diana did not move. She felt Sir Lionel's arm go across her shoulder, protectingly.

"You must see him, Diana," he said, quietly.

"Yes—but I wish he hadn't come, Leo—I have been trying—I wanted——"

She hesitated. It was so difficult to say this to him. But in his wonderful way he comprehended, even as she struggled.

"My dear child—you can't expect to forget him, ever. I know that. The poor fellow was probably in agony of mind at the end. He may have sent a message to you. That's what's brought Wargrave here."

He felt her tremble in his arm. He drew her to him slowly and kissed her. She rested in his embrace for a time.

"I'll go," said Diana, after a pause.

He made no response. He heard her cross the room and the door close.

II

Outside the door of the salon Diana paused. She was calm now. There must be no breakdown. Had she dared to confess it to herself, she was glad Mr. Wargrave had come. She longed to know the story of that terrible end.

Resolutely she opened the door and went in.

Wargrave was looking out over the garden, and turned immediately he heard some one enter the room. He stood silhouetted against the window, but when he stepped forward, Diana thought the light, or her imagination, had tricked her for a second. The next moment she saw him clearly, and stood paralyzed in amazement. It was David who came towards her!

"Diana!" he said, simply, holding out his hands.

"You!" she cried, and seeing his intention, drew back. "I thought you were dead!"

There was no warmth in her voice and it chilled him.

"No—Diana, I want to explain. I've not lost a minute in coming here. It's been terrible, terrible—but I must explain."

She checked him with her hand, a light in her eyes that he could not ignore.

"You were better dead—I might forget you then.

How dare you come here! Why don't you go to your wife?"

He drew back as if she had struck him, and it pleased her to see his guilt.

"Diana—you've heard then! I didn't know myself, but I never imagined you would believe that. Good God, what a monster you must think I am!"

"I do!" she said, with a scornful glance.

"Diana—this is ridiculous. Listen, I'm not what you think. I'm——"

"You are a contemptible hypocrite and a liar. You never were what you made me think. You are still more contemptible for coming here. Please go! I wish to have nothing to do with you!"

Diana made to leave the room, but with a swift step he intercepted her, barring the way. The fury in her eyes forced a cry of amazement from him.

"Good God, Diana! Give me a chance to explain. You shall listen, if I have to hold you here. Poor David Hameldon's dead. He was my secretary. I never was David Hameldon—I'm Arthur Wargrave. David married Meriel Fillison the day before he sailed."

She looked at him in stupefaction. Then he feared she would faint, so white was her face. With a quick resource he took her to a chair and made her sit down.

"Diana, I have deceived you. I was a fool—but it began so easily, and I couldn't tell you, not then, because of something. When I met you at the Goose Fair, and you asked me my name, I told you a lie. For one thing, I acted on impulse. I didn't think we should ever meet again, and like an idiot I thought I'd rather not be known because

—well because—I know it sounds conceited—I’m fairly famous. I was in Nottingham that week, trying out my new play. So, in the impulse, I gave you my secretary’s name, thinking it didn’t matter really since I——”

“Did it in every town—oh, no, why should it matter!” interjected Diana, in cold indignation.

“Diana, don’t say that, please, Diana! It was an impulse—foolish, I know.”

“Your impulse had nothing impulsive in it that I can see,” she retorted, angrily. “You kept up your lie in London, week after week. You decoyed me down to that cottage, where I suppose you take——”

“Diana, stop!” he cried, in a burst of indignation. The angry flush in his face encouraged her now, and she ignored his cry. Rising, she confronted him, in a cold hatred that enabled her to spare him nothing of her detestation.

“You come here expecting me to believe what you say? You may be Arthur Wargrave. You may have been impulsive. All I know is that you have made me suffer such anguish as I can never forgive you for. Why, why, why?”

She threw out her hands in appeal against his conduct, but when he sought to take them, she withdrew quickly, standing back from him as if he were a leper.

“Diana, my dearest—let me explain, Diana, please!” he cried, baffled by her fierce contempt. “I kept up the lie in London, as you say. Yes, because I was in a terrible difficulty. I was already engaged—oh, Diana, don’t look at me like that!—I was engaged to some one I knew I didn’t love. Neither

did she; it was all a mistake. I couldn't tell you that, for you had frightened me, Diana. One day you told me you hated deceit, that it was the one thing you could never forgive—do you remember? And I knew I was deceiving you but that I couldn't tell you the truth then. I knew it was coming right in the end. And it did, Diana. The night before I sailed, Audrey and I went into our engagement and realized it was a mistake, and we agreed to break it. It was my intention to explain everything on my return. I didn't foresee this terrible end—poor David's. And I knew nothing about his marriage until we found her letters in his pocket——"

"And mine!" said Diana, curtly.

"Diana darling, no! How can you think that!"

"My letters were sent to David Hameldon."

"Yes, but not opened. I told David what I had done—he understood why. Diana, you must believe me. I daren't write, it was too involved, I was terrified lest you shouldn't understand. This last fortnight's been a nightmare. I caught the first boat after David's funeral. I——"

Diana's face checked the words on his lips. She stepped towards him, white, quivering with passion.

"A nightmare for you! And for me, what do you imagine? Three months of lying, of deception on deception—neither the man you made yourself out to be, nor a man free to love me. Then the agony of mind, the outrage on hearing of your marriage to that actress. Then the relief of hearing of your death. Yes, relief—I mean it! Nightmare! My God!—what of my nightmare? As for your explanation, it explains one thing only, that you are even a bigger cad than I imagined you

were, throwing over one poor girl for another. How dare you come here! Go! Go!"

She stood back, white with rage, her way barred by him. Never had he seen such fury in a woman and he quailed before it momentarily. Then he appealed to her again.

"Diana—you must understand. I loved you from that first moment, you must know that, surely!" he cried.

"It is a matter of indifference to me whatever I knew. Thank God, I have found some one worthy to love."

He looked at her incredulously, and then, seeing her unflinching eyes—

"Whatever do you mean, Diana?" he cried.

"I am engaged to Sir Lionel Glent!"

She heard his cry of surprise as he started back. She was quick to see her advantage and slipped past him. Gaining the door, she halted there, a white hand clenching the knob.

"You may now realize how odious your presence is in this house," she said, deliberately. The next second the door had closed behind her.

He stood in the empty room, paralyzed by her words, by the intensity of the hatred she had conveyed in her last glance at him.

A few seconds later, recovering himself, he left the salon, passed the butler at the hall door, and entered the car awaiting him.

III

Diana went direct to her room. She knew she could not face Sir Lionel at that moment. He

would be sure to question her and wish to know what news Wargrave had brought. In the privacy of her own room she tried to think out her position. It was extraordinary the composure she felt. At other times she had been a weeping, distraught creature, but now something had hardened within her. She would not waste a moment over this man who had treated her so outrageously. There was Sir Lionel, the soul of honor, offering her far more than it had ever been in the power of David to offer—for she still thought of him as David.

What obsession had taken hold of her, to make her so blind through all those weeks of deceit? She recalled now that Cherry, quick-minded, matter-of-fact Cherry, had thought him mysterious and had warned her. Well, he had had reason for being mysterious, and he had made a sad mistake in thinking she would appreciate his reason—engaged to another woman! What kind of man was it who, first of all, gave a false name, and then played the lover to one woman while engaged to another? He had meant to explain when he returned to England! Now an accident, beyond his control, had, like an act of Fate, stripped the mask from his face.

And, oh, God!—how he had made her suffer. Those nights of anguish following Cherry's revelation. And even after the accident, though she had thought him dead, the long battle in her own heart against his memory, against the spell he had put upon her, making her blind to the love of the man who was ready to give everything he had, with no assurance of her love in return.

Diana dabbed her face with a powder-puff and looked at herself in the mirror. Could that calm-

looking creature be Diana Delaney, who a few minutes ago had seen a man come from the grave? A man who had been her lover, and who had the audacity to think he had still a claim upon her loyalty?

Diana laughed quietly at the face confronting her. It seemed that it had changed extraordinarily. The shy, sensitive girl, inexperienced in life, believing everything, had died. This was a woman, wiser, with knowledge of the world, who looked at her now, looked at her with sterner eyes, with, perhaps a harder expression.

She had been a fool, but at last common sense had been knocked into her. Well, Fortune, with another turn of the wheel, had brought Sir Lionel into her life. She knew now all that he meant—devotion, loyalty, a life of position and affluence, all the splendid things a man like Lionel would give to the woman he loved.

And Lionel, what was he getting in return? Diana did not flinch the answer she saw in her own eyes. Not love—there should be no deception about it. She would not attempt the pretense. But everything else she could give to the man she revered above all others living should be his.

It was good to know exactly where one stood. She had banished at last all indecision in regard to Sir Lionel. It was incredible that ever she should have been blind to the magnanimity of his nature, to the amazing good fortune that attended her on the very heels of disaster.

When Diana entered Sir Lionel's room he was still alone, sitting statuesquely quiet, in the patient manner that moved her so often to pity. It made

her wonder what passed through his mind in those moments of repose. He gave them no clew to the inner world in which he lived. Now, as Diana came into the room, he stood up, in that courteous way of his.

"Has Wargrave gone?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," answered Diana, picking up the book she had left. "Is it too late for me to read?"

He seemed surprised by her question, but recovered himself.

"No. The dressing-bell's not gone yet—if you feel you can," he said, sitting down.

Without any further words Diana opened the book and began to read. His first interruption was when he remarked on her pronunciation of a certain French word.

"Oh—it's like that? I always wondered. Diana, I love to hear your French. Those nuns must have had an apt pupil," he said.

"Leo, don't flatter me so—the poor nuns had an absolute blockhead to teach—but I always loved the language, which helps."

Diana continued reading for about half an hour, until they heard the dressing-bell. She got up to leave.

"Di!"

His voice, the note in it particularly, arrested her going. She had anticipated this moment.

"Yes, Leo?"

"Didn't Wargrave say anything? It's no business of mine, my dear, but a poor devil is curious," he said.

Diana did not look at him as she answered, as

though she feared he might see evasion in her face.

"Practically nothing, Leo. David was killed instantly," she answered.

"I'm sorry—forgive me for asking, Diana."

"Of course, Leo—I would have told you. It was—nice of Mr. Wargrave to call."

"Oh—then he's staying in Nice?" cried Sir Lionel, following Diana's inference.

It was her one lie, she thought. It was perfectly true that there was no word from David, the real David who had been killed.

She did not answer his question, since it was in the nature of a comment, and when she had gained her own room she felt she had emerged successfully from an ordeal. Why should he ever know the truth? David was dead. He believed that. He was so deeply conscientious that if he learned of the existence of David he would immediately free her from his claim. And she did not wish to be freed. It was still more necessary that the understanding between them should be sealed. She would ask him to make an early announcement of their engagement.

Just as Diana had finished dressing there was a tap on her door.

"Come in!" she cried.

"It's me, miss!" called Tuppence, from the other side of the door, doubtful of the propriety of walking into a lady's bedroom.

Diana went to the door and opened it.

"This note's just come, miss, and the garson's waiting for an answer downstairs."

Tuppence was becoming so very proud of his French that Diana hadn't the courage to smile. She

tore open the envelope. On a sheet of notepaper, bearing the address of the Ruhl Hotel, Nice, she read—

"DEAR DIANA,

"I cannot believe that you really mean to dismiss me in this way. Whatever I have done you must know I love you better than life. When your anger has passed I shall be here, waiting for your word. There is nothing yet irrevocable. To such love as ours there can be nothing insurmountable. God bless you, my darling.

"DAVID."

She looked up immediately she had read the note. "There's no answer, Tuppence," she said, without hesitation.

Tuppence made his sedate little bow and departed. Diana closed the door and stood awhile, the note in her hand. So he was waiting in Nice, hoping she would relent! And he had the audacity to sign the note "David," a name he had no right to.

She crumpled up the sheet of notepaper and threw it in the fireplace. This time, for some absurd reason, she felt on the verge of tears. It was unfair that she should have to battle alone like this.

CHAPTER XXVI

I

"My dears, you're not forgetting my tea at the Negresco to-day?" asked Lady Glent, as she rose from the luncheon table. "I'm expecting about twenty—and my tables are at the far end of the hall, away from the band. I hate having to scream at people over the saxophone."

"We're certainly coming, mater," answered Sir Lionel. "Di's half taught me a new step, and I've to get it perfect before we leave. That reminds me, Diana, we must book those berths at once. There's a terrible rush home begins soon. All the politicians go back for the opening of Parliament, and, after that, the Exodus."

"I'll do it to-morrow—there's such a nice young man at Cook's," answered Diana, gayly.

"What's this?" cried Sir Lionel. "So that's why you always change your money there, is it? I'm going with you the next time!"

"Then you'll come this afternoon," laughed Diana, slipping her arm through his as they left the room.

Lady Glent halted with one foot on the first step of the stairs, before ascending for her afternoon siesta.

"Oh, Leo, I intended asking you—did you see that your hero's engagement has been broken off?"

"My hero—whoever's that?" he asked.

"Your wonderful Mr. Wargrave, of course. I saw it in yesterday's paper. He's not marrying Audrey Gloucester after all. Which just shows that a man can know all about marriage on the stage and be no good at it off!"

"My dear, are you suggesting I should make a good playwright?" asked Sir Lionel.

"No, darling," laughed his mother. "But it seems to me three acts of theory aren't equal to one engagement ring, in this case. And such a pretty girl, too. I expect some actress's got hold of him!"

"She may have broken it off," said Diana, steadily, wondering if she had turned pale.

"H'm, she may!" commented Lady Glent, with a matchmaker's doubt, and went up the stairs.

"I'm sorry about that," said Sir Lionel, when they had found chairs in the garden.

"Why?" asked Diana, lightly.

"Oh, I am. You know, I've always taken a great interest in Wargrave, although we've only met once. He's a clever chap! I admire him immensely."

"How lovely those schizanthus are!" exclaimed Diana, abruptly, proud of the word, having got it from the gardener that morning. She could not endure the conversation much longer. So the canceled-engagement part had not been a lie. But he might have arranged it subsequently. A fortnight had elapsed since his visit.

Her next thought was that, if he had deliberately broken his engagement to Audrey Gloucester, then he still retained hope. No, it really looked as if he had spoken the truth when he said the break

had been agreed to before he sailed for America.

Diana was still occupied with this speculation when they set forth to the Negresco Hotel, where she was now one of the best-known habitués. Gossip had already linked her name with Sir Lionel's, but, contrary to her first intention, she had asked him not to give any foundation to the rumor. It was too soon yet, and Nice was not the place. He agreed to her wish without demur.

Lady Glent's twenty had swollen to almost forty when Diana and Sir Lionel arrived. Half-way through tea Diana felt the blood chilled in her veins. Could it be that Lady Glent was a little—excited? Sir Lionel had noticed it, too. The quality of his mother's laughter, rising over that of every one else, made him alert.

"These parties are too much for her," he said to Diana during a dance. "I think we should get her away soon."

"You've noticed, Leo?"

"Of course I have. She's been so much better lately, thanks to you. I suppose we'll have a few relapses. Poor mater, she's making a plucky fight!"

"Then you know about Lady Glent and myself? Leo, you mustn't think it's me. She's trying tremendously. How sharp you are!" said Diana.

"The mater told me—how you went over that night to Villefranche. I don't forget things like that," he said, gratitude in his voice.

Diana said nothing. She was wondering how soon she could get Lady Glent away. It was not too noticeable yet. They must insist on her going

back with them, although she would make every excuse to dine out.

The moment the dance was over Lady Glent rushed up to them in great excitement.

"Leo, who do you think's here! Mr. Wargrave! He's at Lady Cornaway's table. I've told her you're dying to meet him. She's bringing him over as soon as she can. I'll ask them to dine with us to-night."

In her excitement she did not notice the effect of her words on Diana, who was leading her son towards their table. He felt her tremor instantly. Before he could answer his mother, she spoke—

"Lady Glent—I have a terrible headache. Do you mind if I go at once?"

"My dear, of course, I'm so sorry—why, you look quite ill, Diana!" exclaimed Lady Glent. She had seen the girl's color go in an instant, and was startled.

"It's this room—it's frightfully stuffy. I'll go now," said Diana.

Sir Lionel refused to leave her until she was in the car. He would have gone home with her but she begged him to stay.

"You must bring Lady Glent home, Leo. Don't leave her here, please. I feel I ought to stay, but I simply can't," cried Diana.

"I'll bring her. You go and rest. And I shan't let any one come back to dine," he said, decisively.

The door of the limousine closed on her. She had a last glimpse of Sir Lionel, as a concierge led him back. It had been as much as she could do to preserve a calm demeanor. Even so, she wondered

if he had observed anything. His last remark was singularly to the point.

David still waiting in Nice! She felt she could never go out now. She could never run a risk like that again. Lowering the window, the cool evening air revived her, and the color came back into her cheeks. But her heart seemed bound with an iron band, and she trembled at the thought of the ordeal she had evaded. And she was worried also by the fact that she had fled, leaving Lady Glent to her fate.

II

Sir Lionel, returning to the tables, found Lady Cornaway and Arthur Wargrave, sitting with his mother. They shook hands, and when the orchestra struck up he asked Lady Cornaway to dance. On the floor he questioned her.

"I only met him yesterday—he's at the Ruhl. Don't you think him fascinating?" she asked.

"Intellectually, yes—otherwise——"

"I can assure you otherwise, my dear Sir Lionel!" she laughed. "Can't you see how all the women here hate me for my handsome lion?"

"Happily I can't see anything like that, or I might be jealous," he answered lightly.

He kept up a playful conversation until the dance was ended. When they got back to their table he found no chance of speaking to the dramatist, who was surrounded by his admirers, and presently was carried off by his hostess.

At six o'clock, the car having returned, and their guests departed, he suggested they should leave, as

he felt tired. To his surprise Lady Glent agreed at once.

"I shan't rest until I get back and find how that poor child is," she said, as they entered the car.

"I never saw any one look so much like death."

"Bless you!" cried Sir Lionel.

"Why?" asked Lady Glent, surprised by his irrelevance.

"Bless you!" he repeated, enigmatically, and took her hand in his own, squeezing it affectionately.

Lady Glent little knew how useful her eyes had been to him.

CHAPTER XXVII

I

THE waiter, hearing a command to enter after he had tapped at the door of the suite on the second floor of the Hôtel de Ruhl, walked boldly in, carrying a breakfast tray.

"Bonjour, m'sieur," he said, to the almost invisible figure in the bed. The room was dark.

Crossing to the window, he threw back the closed shutters and the light flooded in. Wargrave, sitting up, looked out over a low balcony on to a sun-flecked sea of blue, rising into vision above a clump of tufted palms.

"Merci, m'sieur," said the waiter, withdrawing.

Wargrave surveyed the tray with its coffee-pot, beet sugar, roll and pat of butter. It was sparse fare for an Englishman, but even so it was beyond his appetite. He had slept badly. He had never slept well in Nice, but he could not blame the place.

Pushing his feet into slippers, he walked out, pajama-clad, on to the balcony. Even thus early, the sun struck warm upon him. The Promenade was almost deserted. In two hours more the fashionable throng would fill it, gossiping with friends, ignoring the itinerant photographers, purveyors of envy to poor, sunless devils in England.

Wargrave's mind gave no heed to the blithe day smiling at his feet. His thoughts went back to

the Negresco, and the narrowly averted tragedy of that *thé-dansant*. For he had seen Diana go, even while he racked his brains to find some excuse for not being carried across to the Glents' table.

One thing was clear. He must leave Nice at once. He had waited two weeks and no word had come from Diana. Again and again he had decided to go to the Villa Dardanelli and demand to see her, but each time he realized the unfairness of it. He could not force himself upon her in this manner, particularly in view of Sir Lionel Glent.

It was clear, also, that he could not honorably remain in Nice, with the prospect of placing her in a position such as had been so narrowly avoided yesterday. Yes, he must go, and at once.

He turned from the balcony and paced the room. Why had he been such a lunatic? It had been an easy, natural thing that night in Nottingham to have given her David's name, and, after that, how easy all the rest! Dishonest? God knew he had no intention of that kind. It had seemed the simplest way amid all his difficulties. This terrible tangle of David's death, and the mess he had made of his life, had been outside his reckoning.

Poor Diana, he had caused her to suffer unwittingly, and now it seemed as if his own life was going to be spoiled by his folly. No, not spoiled. He was determined it should not be spoiled. Somehow he would see her, make her understand. Nothing she said would make him believe he could be shut out of her life. In the last resort, he would take her by violence and force the truth out of her.

And then, stopping suddenly in the middle of

the room, he laughed bitterly at his melodramatic mood. Diana could not be tackled like that. And there was that blind fellow, too.

He had dressed, and instructed his valet to pack and take tickets on the afternoon express for London, when the telephone rang in his sitting-room. It was the concierge in the hall. Sir Lionel Glent wished to know if he could see m'sieur.

"Show him up," replied Wargrave, curtly.

Sir Lionel Glent! What had brought him here? Diana? He could hardly believe that. Sir Lionel's demeanor yesterday had shown he knew nothing. It was not possible she had told him.

He waited, uneasily, while his visitor was brought up. It would be necessary for him to betray nothing concerning Diana, if Diana was the subject of this visit.

There was a tap on the door and it opened. A page stood aside to permit Sir Lionel to enter. For a moment he paused on the threshold, and then Wargrave, suddenly aware of his affliction, went towards him, and with words of greeting, led him into the room.

"Mr. Wargrave, you must forgive this early call," said Sir Lionel, as soon as he was seated. "We are alone?"

"Yes. Do you wish to be alone?"

"Please. I am here on a matter of importance to us both."

"Then I'll lock the door," said Wargrave, turning the key.

He had no doubt now what had brought his visitor. He seated himself near to the blind man.

"You have something to say to me, Sir Lionel?"

"No—to ask. I will be to the point. Why did you come to Nice to see Miss Delaney?"

Wargrave looked at the ascetic face before him. He could not have evaded the question had he wished.

"I had something important to say to her," he answered.

"Can you tell me what it was?"

"I'm afraid I cannot, Sir Lionel. If Diana——"

"I see we can speak of her as Diana," said Sir Lionel, quickly, with the first glimmer of a smile. "Then, you have known her—intimately?"

Wargrave looked sharply at the man before him. He had been caught.

"I don't understand you," he said, coldly.

"Neither do I you. Wargrave, won't you trust me with the truth?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Sir Lionel, calmly, his head tilted slightly and his face turned full towards the light, "that I am very much in the dark and I want to help you both. Since the day you called at the villa, Diana has not been the same. Yesterday, at the prospect of meeting you, she fled from the hotel. The mention of your name sent the blood from her face. Why should you affect her like this? We are engaged, and I feel I have some right to ask you this."

Wargrave made no reply. What could he say without affecting Diana's future? He could tell this poor blind fellow the truth, but if Diana had not told him, then it was clear she did not wish him to know.

"Why do you imagine all this?" he said at last.

"Wargrave, you're fencing!" cried Sir Lionel. "There is something. Shall I tell you what it is? In all this mystery I am certain of one thing. You are the man Diana loves, and you are the man she has always loved, whether your name is David Hameldon or Arthur Wargrave!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Wargrave, rising from his chair.

"Am I right?" demanded the other.

Wargrave went to the window. He could not lie to this man. He was too honest and helpless, even had he the will. And clever.

"Well—and if you are?" he said, after a silence in which they could hear the sea falling on the stony shore below.

"If I am, Wargrave, that poor girl must not sacrifice herself to me, whom she does not love. That's why I have come to you, why I am asking you to explain. Who are you, David Hameldon or Arthur Wargrave?"

Wargrave looked at the man before him, baffled in mind and sight, but so determined in spirit. The sight of him smote at his heart, and suddenly in a gesture of admiration he put both hands on the blind man's shoulders.

"Glent—by God, you're a man in a million. Listen!" he cried. And he told him then the story of David and Diana.

II

When Sir Lionel arrived back at the Villa Dardanelli, shortly before noon, he went direct to the room overlooking the garden, which he used as a

study. Sitting in a chair by the open balcony, whence came the scent of the flowers by which only he knew their presence around, he might have been a man in a trance, so still was he. He could hear the soft splashing of a hose being played on the shrubbery somewhere, but he scarcely heeded the sound, so far away were his thoughts. They were long, long thoughts that struck down into the roots of his life, and he knew that in this hour he must make a decision affecting his whole future. Perhaps he had already made the decision, or rather events had made it for him, but before he acted he wished to see clearly each step and its consequence.

It had never been his way to compromise with a half-truth. What Wargrave told him this morning completely shattered the pleasant future he had planned. The thing had to be faced squarely. The man Diana had loved was living. The thing he surmised had now to be tested—this man living was the man Diana still loved. He could not let her attempt deception for his own sake. Disaster for them all lay that way.

For himself life had never been kind. One more buffet might leave him bloody but unbowed. He had lived beyond expecting mere happiness. So much had been shut out of life that he cherished an inner flame like a vestal fire. The darkness of self-deception should never blind him. And it would be wilful self-deception to believe that Diana could now give him all he had hoped to win. Folly and misery lay that way. He knew enough of both to be certain they were not worth their price.

He had persuaded Wargrave to postpone his departure until the morrow, and he had promised

to inform him by the afternoon whether there was any purpose in his remaining in Nice. But confronted now with the necessity of immediate action, he found it distasteful. It was distressing to himself; it was going to be a scene still more distressing to Diana.

Fearing to lose action in thought, he rose and touched the bell by the fireplace. In answer to his summons, Hilton appeared.

"Is Miss Delaney in?" he asked.

"I believe she is in her room, sir."

"Ask her to be kind enough to come down to me."

Hilton withdrew. After a time the door opened and he knew it was Diana. She came over to him where he sat.

"You want me, Leo?" she asked.

"Yes—where's mother?"

"In her room, we've been doing accounts and letters. *Leo, we were wrong about last night. It was just excitement. I feel very guilty."

Sir Lionel reached out for her and she sat on the arm of his chair.

"I'm just as guilty, then. Poor mater—suspicion's a terrible thing."

They were silent awhile. He hardly knew how to begin his task.

"Diana," he said at last.

She felt his arm around her tighten, and looked down at him.

"My dear, I am going to talk to you very seriously."

"About what?" she asked. But even as she spoke something in his manner and the tone of his voice made her heart beat quicker.

"I have seen Arthur Wargrave this morning. No, my dear, sit still. We must talk quietly. I don't blame you, Diana, for not telling me everything. I can understand why you could not tell me. But we must face facts—you must face them."

"Lionel, please, need we talk about this? David Hameldon is dead."

"No—he is alive, Diana," corrected Sir Lionel.

"He's dead to me," said Diana, spiritedly.

"You think so, my dear?"

He felt her tremble, and suddenly rising to his feet, he confronted her, taking both her hands in his own.

"My dear girl," he said, gravely, "look into my eyes."

She looked, pale under the scrutiny of that unseeing face.

"Leo!" she breathed, half in fear, half in pity of him.

"Would you deceive me?"

"No—you know that!" she said, tensely.

"I know it—yes, but I fear you may deceive yourself, which is the same thing. Listen, my dear, the man you loved as David Hameldon is still living, as Arthur Wargrave. Does that make no difference?"

She did not answer, and he waited until he knew the meaning of her silence.

"My dear, I am twelve years older than you, and to me you are still a child in some things. Both of you are children, and this is a child's quarrel. Oh, yes, I know he deceived you. But don't magnify it. He met you in that Fair. He's only a boy, after all, despite all he's achieved. He finds

some one he doesn't know, some one he never expects to see again, and on the impulse of the moment he tells you his name's David Hameldon, the first name that comes to him, since it's his friend's. It isn't a crime, Diana—nor deliberate deceit. 'It was just a silly impulse of secrecy. And after that you meet again, in the Park——'

"He could have told me then."

"He might—but now there's another reason, and it's an honorable reason, Diana. He's engaged to some one who's away, whom he doesn't love, knowing now what love really is. And frightened of losing you, for you wouldn't have met him again had you known the position, he finds it convenient to go on with the deception. Diana, human beings will do much for a little happiness. Men have committed murder in the name of love—and this wasn't murder. And he was working to the open truth, Diana. He's told me the story of those weeks. There was that girl he respected, Audrey Gloucester; there were her feelings to be considered. He couldn't be brutal or abrupt. Happily for him he found events had worked towards a solution. She wanted their engagement broken because of some one she really loved. So he broke it the night before he sailed. When he came home again you were to have known the whole story—and I don't doubt him, my dear. He couldn't know the frightful turn of events awaiting them in America—nor Hameldon's mess-up with Meriel Fillison. There seemed an evil spite in that twist of events—and it caught you both. Diana, I've wrung all this out of him this morning. He would say nothing until I deliberately challenged him with the truth. He

had arranged to leave—to-day—because he wouldn't risk putting you in a position like yesterday's. I've told him he's to stay."

"To stay, Leo?" whispered Diana.

"To stay," he repeated. "My dear girl—he can't go yet."

"Why?"

"Because you and I and he have to settle this. Do you understand?"

She did not answer. She wished he would release her hands so that she could escape the unnerving task of confronting him. His intense face stripped her mind of every covering.

"Diana—I have one question only, but you must answer it," he said, quietly, and as he spoke she knew what the question was before he uttered it.

"Do you love me—as you loved David?" he asked.

For what seemed an age she could not bring herself to speak the word undeniably clear within her. When at last she spoke, it was as a faint echo of her conscience. But it did not escape him.

"That means, Diana—you still love him. Yes, it does," he emphasized, when, by a movement of her body, she demurred. "My dear, you will hurt me terribly if——"

"I couldn't hurt you, Leo—oh, I couldn't ever hurt you!" cried Diana, passionately.

A smile crossed his face as he heard her avowal.

"You would hurt me terribly if you did anything for pity of me. I had hoped to make you love me, my dear. There can be no such hope now David is alive. You might dismiss him; I might dismiss

him, but we should know he was there. And I am too proud to be second best."

"Don't—don't!" she cried, and suddenly in the anguish of the thought she flung her arms around his neck, bursting into tears.

He made no reply, his face lifted above her bent head. He held her, glad she could not see his face in that moment. He heard the hose still spraying in the garden, heard a canary, in the villa beyond the palms, singing lustily. And through his mind there was a swift procession of the years to come, whose starkness he must not shrink from. Finally, in quiescent mood, he felt her move from his embrace.

"Diana—I shall ask him to come—this afternoon?" he said.

She could make no answer, but he took her silence for assent.

"I promised I would let him know—we must end his suspense."

CHAPTER XXVIII

I

TOWARDS the end of March, when the first crocus and the swallow dares, Diana was back in London. Once it had been her dream to see the South, and now, with the strange perversity that visits the gratified desire, she found herself loving London, as if returned from long exile. Was there, she asked herself one day, as the bus took her down Piccadilly towards Knightsbridge, anywhere so dear to her? Unexpected vistas of loveliness broke on her sight in each mood of this rain-sunshine smitten month.

There was the strange light of afternoon that fell upon the columned façade and dome of the National Gallery—a warm light bathing gray-white stone. Seen from Pall Mall it was like a portal to the Elysian Fields. She loved the solid arches of the Ritz Hotel, and the sudden break of green beyond, with Buckingham Palace glimpsed through the trees, or Westminster Bridge bleakly stretching below the finial beauty of Big Ben and the Gothic towers.

London houses, with doors as various as the people who passed through them, and London chimneys, pots, rich, poor, crooked, straight, plain, artistic, as individual as those hidden lives whose feet touched the grates they served, she liked them all for they aroused imagination.

And, perhaps most of all, she loved the roaring buses, the red blood running through the arteries and veins of London. She liked the way they jerked, and swerved and sang with their loads up streets and down avenues. On cold days she sought the front seat, inside on the left, where she had a clear glassed view, unobstructed by the driver, of the traffic and the people on the pavements, with quick, tantalizing glimpses of bargains in shop windows and loitering crowds enticed by sales. For in London there were always sales—Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter Sales, and Clearance Sales, and the Stock-taking Sales, and the Special Reduction Sales—oh, it was one long excitement for the heart of woman!

But the spot dearest of all lay back behind a long avenue of trees, where, on bright mornings, little girls with pigtails, and little boys in tan breeches and leggings, rode ponies under the watchful eyes of raddle-faced grooms. There, behind the world of fashion riding and loitering, stood the Diana Fountain, a little withdrawn but not so lonely now, with the breaking of leaves and chirping of birds. That lissom figure was part of her life, her personal history. To David and herself it was an intimate witness grown friendly with association. Sometimes, laughing, she insisted on going across to look at David, also standing amid the burgeoning of boughs, austerer, as became the young warrior.

"But I've lost touch with him—unless we call him Arthur," said Wargrave, as he stood with her before the bronze statue.

"No—we can't do that, and you can never be

Arthur to me. There's your god-father, and David you must remain," she said.

So he was David and she was Diana, and they had a feeling that as long as life should last these namesakes were symbols of their love.

Diana's return to London filled the house in George Street with rejoicing. Mrs. Maggs, bursting with cheer and vigor, opened the door, and then suddenly retired into the cat-haunted darkness of the passage when she saw the Glent car drawn up. But Diana insisted on a presentation to Lady Glent and Sir Lionel, which left her "all of a fluster," as she afterwards explained.

When they had gone, Diana climbed up to her room, accompanied by Mrs. Maggs and Felix. It looked a little cheerless, for there was no balcony opening on to a garden of flowers and a cluster of palms, but when the fire was lit and her things put out, Diana knew she loved it more than any other twenty square-feet in the world. And, somehow, Mrs. Maggs, conscious of the change, had found daffodils and primroses, which decorated the dressing-table and mantelpiece.

"Eh, but it's good to see you again, dearie, and looking bonny you are. There's Miss Carmen here a-running in and out all day to know if you'd come."

"Is Cherry here?"

"Yes—she came back two days ago. The tour's finished, and she's on the films again—but a nice part this time, the young widow of a count killed in a duel. She looks lovely in her crêpe. They should never have let it go out. Now, dearie, you'll have something to eat? Oh, yes, you will. I've

had it stewing over an hour. It was six o'clock, you wrote, but I believe in bein' early, and I 'ad it ready at five, in case like. The smell of it's put Felix all in a frenzy. Now come down sopen, dearie."

"Oh, Mrs. Maggs, don't go—I've such a lot to ask. Miss Penn-Porter——"

"She's well and busy. She's going to have an exhibition, and if she hasn't drawn me for it!"

"And your son?"

"I 'ears reg'lar, bless 'is 'eart!"

"And Mr. Moulton?"

"Oh—he's gone, all of a sudden. He rushed in one day and said he was going to be a secretary to an old friend, who was rich and had a fine house off Piccadilly. He's done well for himself, for he went off in a Rolls-Royce, and a valet came to pack his things, and he came back one day to say he'd given up the stage and was goin' yachting. He always did know his way about, dearie. You've heard me say, have friends where the money is and something nice may 'appen to you. He was a good lad, if a bit too stylish at times. I'm sorry 'e's gone, although 'e never would get up in the mornin'. But you all leave me sooner or later. That's the way of life. It's me and Felix who stick on."

Diana hadn't the heart to break the news that, after June, she would be going, but during the meal that Mrs. Maggs had put out for her down in the kitchen, she told her of her engagement to David.

"Then it's not that poor blind gentleman. Well, I hope you're doin' right. Can he keep you, dearie?" asked Mrs. Maggs.

Diana assured her on that point. The rest of

the evening was spent in satisfying Mrs. Maggs's curiosity about life on the Riviera.

At nine o'clock Cherry Carmen came in and, half an hour later, Miss Penn-Porter. It was twelve o'clock when a very tired Diana, having related her experiences in detail, got to bed.

II

Their marriage was fixed for the first week in July. The fact that her father had expressed a desire to marry them, and that the wedding should take place from her old home, marked for Diana the happy end of all estrangement. It was not that her father's nature had changed, she realized that was impossible at his age, but marriage was taking her away from the conflict of different conceptions of conduct. There were signs, however, that the Rev. Delaney was growing aware that youth would have its liberty.

"We nearly fainted when we came in one night at eleven, and he said, 'You're very late, my dears.' Mother just ran a needle in her thumb, and no wonder! Stephen said he was sure it was a sign of a stroke coming. But you know how gloomy Stephen can be,"—thus had written Joan, on one historic occasion when the expected wrath had not fallen.

Diana's choice of July had been determined by her desire not to leave the Glents too soon. Each week had brought fresh victories in the quiet battle fought for Lady Glent. There were relapses, but they grew fewer, and it really seemed as if the unhappy woman had obtained a mastery over herself.

She said it was Diana, but Diana knew the conquest was largely her own, assisted by sympathy and understanding.

One evening towards the end of June, Diana, contrary to custom, for she generally dined with the Glents, went back to George Street. She was going out to a dance with David, and wished to change into an evening gown. Before she went up to her room she called in on Mrs. Maggs. The old lady had been upset that morning by the non-arrival of the usual letter from her son. It was surprising how one day's delay troubled Mrs. Maggs. She was immediately filled by the direst forebodings regarding Jim. It was useless to emphasize the fact that one day's delay in mails coming all the way from India was negligible. She had marked with a black cross on a calendar the dates on which Jim's letters should arrive. Mrs. Maggs's face told instantly any failure of this program.

Opening the kitchen door, Diana found the place in darkness. She was about to go out when a cry from the cat, somewhere in the kitchen, made her halt.

"Felix!" called Diana.

Again there was a cry from the cat, and Diana, finding the switch, turned on the light. To her surprise Mrs. Maggs was there, in her chair, asleep. She decided not to wake her, when the cat jumped up into the old lady's lap and miauled piteously.

"Come down, Felix!" cried Diana. But the cat only miauled still louder, rubbing himself against Mrs. Maggs, his erect tail brushing her bent face. It was curious, thought Diana, this did not wake her, and she stepped closer. Suddenly some un-

named apprehension, caused by the curious silence and the forward tilt of Mrs. Maggs's head, shot through Diana's heart.

"Mrs. Maggs!" she called, loudly, and then again—"Mrs. Maggs—it's me, Mrs. Maggs!"

Diana took her by the shoulder and shook her gently. The way in which the head rolled, and a hand fell from her lap, confirmed the quick fear.

Suppressing a scream, Diana put an arm around the figure in the chair and lifted the bent face. For a long moment of horror she gazed, and then with a cry Diana folded both arms about her. Mrs. Maggs was dead.

III

Diana never quite knew how she got through the next few hours. Cherry was out, and also Miss Penn-Porter and Miss Jerningham. Her first impulse was to fetch in a policeman, but there seemed something cold-blooded about such an act. So she telephoned for the doctor, and sat with the old lady during the half hour that elapsed before he arrived. In this time, after much searching among papers tucked behind ornaments, she found the address of Mrs. Newton, the old lady's sister-in-law, who had visited her during her illness. Finally, Diana rang up David, who arrived immediately after the doctor.

"I don't think we need have an inquest," said the doctor to Diana, before he left, after his examination. "I've been attending her for this trouble constantly. It's just heart failure. I'm afraid those stairs are the cause—or anything else

—the heart was very weak. I've expected it."

"Would worry account for it?" asked Diana.

"Oh, yes. Any little thing at her age, with a heart like that. Was she worried? She seemed such a cheery old soul."

"I think she fretted because her son's letter is late. It should have come this morning."

"That would be enough," said the doctor, preparing to go.

At eight o'clock, in response to her telegram, Mrs. Newton arrived. Diana was talking to her when there was a knock on the street door.

"That's the postman—I wonder if that's her letter?" said Diana.

"What letter, Miss Delaney?"

"She was worried this morning because she hadn't had the usual letter from her son in India. I'll go up and see."

Mrs. Newton was about to speak, and changed her mind. When Diana came down again she carried a letter.

"Yes—it's come. I know it by the color of the envelope. Poor Mrs. Maggs—what a tragedy!"

Mrs. Newton took the letter, examined the envelope a moment and then opened it. When she had read it, she sighed, and wiped her eyes. Diana was just about to go when she stopped her.

"Miss Delaney—close that door. I'm going to tell you something. P'r'aps I oughtn't to, but she was always fond of you—and she wouldn't mind, I think. You said what a tragedy, but you don't know half what a tragedy it is!"

"I know she just lived for those letters from India," said Diana.

"India, my dear! They're not from India nor anywhere near India. They're from prison!"

"Prison—he's in prison!" cried Diana.

"Ay, poor lad, and for life. He's been there nine years now. He was sentenced to be hanged, for strangling a young woman he used to walk out. He was only a lad of twenty, in barracks, and she couldn't have been any good, because it turned out she was in trouble with another soldier. But you know what love-struck lads are! She jilted him, and he saw red and strangled her in a wood. They arrested him at 'ome, where he'd gone. You can imagine what that poor old soul went through. We sat up all one night waiting to 'ear if he'd got a reprieve. They gave it 'im because everybody spoke so well of 'im. She was living in Brixton then, with 'er 'usband just dead—he drank awful—and, of course, with all the scandal, she felt she had to move, so she came here. Poor soul, she kept a bright 'eart, that she did, though Gawd knows 'ow! So that's why them letters came from India, Miss Delaney. Just look at it."

Mrs. Newton held out the letter for Diana to read. But although she made the pretense, she could see nothing, which was as well, for she had a feeling that no eyes should read it save those for which it was written.

CHAPTER XXIX

DIANA looked round the room where she had worked so happily. The cover had been put on the typewriter, the last letters filed away, the monthly checks signed, and Johnson given the wages for the household staff. And now there was nothing more to do but to say good-by to Cadogan Square. On the morrow David was motoring her home, and when she returned to London, to live in a slice of a house in Walton Place, she would be Mrs. Diana Wargrave.

She sat at her desk thinking, a little amazed still by the events of the past nine months. She had run through many moods and experiences in the short time, and she felt years away from that rather crude, timid creature who had stood on the threshold of a house in George Street, seeking a London lodging.

She was the sadder now because of the happiness that seemed before her with David. Could Fate be quite so kind, bringing to her out of such trials the man she loved most? She was still a little fearful in believing in the happiness of the human lot. Sir Lionel, for instance, if ever a man merited happiness it was this man, so unselfish and gentle in all things, and with a cheerful courage nothing could break. Just how she would part from him she could not think.

There was a tap on the door, a familiar tap at

this hour, and, as often, it opened to reveal the immaculately buttoned Tuppence.

"Tea is served, miss," he said.

"Thank you, Tuppence," she replied, and rose from her chair. The boy held open the door and waited until she had passed through.

It was sad to think she would not again see his slim figure racing up and down these stairs, never a hair of his shiny little head displaced, never a smirk absent from his chubby face. He had announced with great joy that in a month he was going out of buttons into tails. For her, with the buttons Tuppence would have vanished forever.

She found Lady Glent with Sir Lionel in his sitting-room. Immediately after lunch Diana had had a long talk with Lady Glent, following the winding up of business details, and they had then made their farewell, which had been in the nature of a vow of continued friendship.

"Diana, my dear—this is our last tea together, and I don't like it," said Lady Glent, sitting down behind the tea-tray.

"Now, mother—none of that 'it-can-never-happen-again' torture!" cried her son. "I know you women enjoy a little weep on these occasions. But for myself I shall let Diana go without a tear. Dry-eyed and hard-hearted, I shall say 'So long'! When next I see the bride——"

"She'll be no longer our Diana, she'll be Mrs. Wargrave," sighed Lady Glent.

"Oh, no, she won't!" exclaimed Sir Lionel, emphatically.

Both women stared at him.

"She'll be Diana Delaney for a few minutes."

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Diana.

"Wargrave has invited me to be his best man. I hoped he'd have the sense to feel that obligation, and like a sound fellow he has. So you'll find me at the altar steps, my dear."

"You are coming down to Nottingham?" cried Diana.

"Most certainly, and the mater with me. Have you any objections?"

Diana looked at him and then, controlling her voice desperately—

"There's nothing would give me more pleasure—and pride. You know that, Leo," she said.

"I suppose, strictly speaking, I shall be the only person led to the altar, but I promise not to trip or create a sensation," he laughed.

They drank their tea and talked of anything but the one thing in their minds. The minutes fled. Tea was finished. Diana left the room to put on her hat. When she came back she found Lady Glent in the hall. One look from her told her the reason. She went into the room, and found Sir Lionel standing with his back to the fireplace.

"I'm going now, Leo," she said, quietly.

He held out his arms and she went into them. For a few moments neither of them spoke.

"God bless you, Diana," he said, at last.

"And you!" she cried, looking into the face bent over her.

The next moment she put her arms around his neck and their lips met in a kiss that conveyed all they could not say. Then, as quickly as it had happened, she slipped from his arms. Her mouth

trembled as she tried to say a last word, but she could not speak, and turning, left the room.

In the hall she found Lady Glent. Somehow they said their farewell, and went towards the door. Diana passed through. Tuppence was there, holding it open.

"Good-by, Miss Delaney," he said.

"Good-by, Tuppence," she replied, scarcely daring to look at him.

She ran down the steps, and turned quickly into the blurred Square.

Sir Lionel, still standing with his back to the fireplace, heard the hall door close. Then, listening, he heard her go down the steps and walk quickly along the pavement under his window. Her footsteps died away. A taxi hummed and faded in the distance. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked insolently.

Sir Lionel went back to his chair, picking two lumps out of the sugar bowl.

"Thingummy!" he called.

The Dandie Dinmont sat up, ears cocked.

"Jingummy!" he cried.

The Sealyham was alert instantly.

"Gentlemen, you will roll."

They rolled.

"You will groan."

They groaned pitifully.

"And die for your country!"

Both dogs lay stiff in mock death.

"But old soldiers never die, so—up-Guards-and-at-'em!"

The dogs leaped instantly, catching the thrown sugar.

There was a sound of joyous crunching. Then, the feast over, the dogs resumed their positions—Thingummy on the right, Jingummy on the left of their master sitting silent in his chair. ;

THE END

